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ATHERTON;
A TALE OF THE LAST CENTURY.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "RANK AND TALENT," &c.

William Pitt Scargill

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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ATHERTON.

CHAPTER I.

FRANK in a short time recovered of his wound, at which the surgeon hypocritically expressed his wonder, and Tom as hypocritically expressed his joy. By the confinement, however, which had lately been imposed upon him, he had been able to make progress in the affections of Charlotte Vernon, and not only to complete his conquest over the heart of the young lady, but still farther to ingratiate himself with every individual of the two

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families. Sir Edward Vernon, from the excess of amiableness, was, happily for himself, partially insensible to the moral worthlessness of the character of his supposed son ;—but having the sensibilities of a gentleman somewhat as to forms, and outward manner, he was much discomposed and annoyed by the unconquerable ungraciousness of the young man's deportment, and was much in the habit of pointing out, for his instruction and example, the behaviour and deportment of Frank.—This, though done in the purest spirit of gentleness, did not soften the heart of Tom, or render him at all more graciously disposed towards his rival ; and from having heartlessly desired his destruction, as the means of removing an obstruction to his schemes, he was now anxious to dispose of Frank, on the principle of sheer revenge, and absolute hatred.

Tom was crafty, though a blockhead. But nature, in mercy to the species, when forming those characters, which seem a blot upon the fair face of the moral creation, seldom endows malignity with intellectual discrimination, but instead of wisdom, she gives them a near sighted craftiness which they mistake for wisdom, and then trusting to its imperfect light they are led to betray and outwit themselves. By the schemes of Major Martin, and his rude unprincipled son, Frank was not betrayed or destroyed ; but his interest was promoted, and the very ends which these men had in view were defeated and thwarted by their own perverse cunning.

Nicholson, who had been a willing tool in the hands of Martin the elder, was also a contributor to the demolition of their schemes. He had introduced Frank to the billiard table in order that he might have him more effectua-

ally in his power ; and was disappointed in the result of the game, which Frank had played with the Macclesfield grazier. Still however he had hopes, that this auspicious event, as he thought it to Frank, might induce his destined victim to more serious and settled play. But it was an after thought, and the lawyer considered it an exceedingly fortunate turn of affairs, that by the accident of Master Lee having been robbed on the highway, and one of the party, who had robbed him, being afterwards seen in company with Atherton, there was some possibility of involving the young man in an accusation of highway robbery. It so happened however that, when the men who had committed the robbery were taken up, it appeared that Master Lee had not been so far intoxicated on the night of his loss at the billiard table, as to forget the event, or any of its circumstances.

Nicholson thus disappointed bent his steps, towards evening to the cottage of Major Martin at Hampstead.

"We can make nothing of this old fool at last," said the lawyer, "he recollects the loss of the note at the billiard table, and that he had nothing but gold with him, when he was stopped on Finchley common."

"It is unfortunate," said Martin, with his usual coolness, "but if it be so, we must adopt some other scheme. There is but one that is effectual, and I should have used that in the first instance."

Nicholson turned pale, and trembled, and looked in the Major's face interrogatively.

"Well."

"Do I understand you rightly?" asked the trembling scrivener.

"If you are not a fool you do."

"Surely Sir," replied the lawyer in a tone of

unaffected and terrified solemnity, "you do not mean to say that you have a design of imbruing your hands in the young man's blood."

"But I do.—Sit down, sit down. Let us take the matter up coolly. You are a clumsy fellow, Nicholson; but you are a coward."

"A coward!" And thereupon he attempted to look big, but he failed miserably, and looked like a simpleton.

Without noticing the little man's exclamation, the Major continued; "You must go with me into Yorkshire."

"I go with you?"

"Yes, you must go with me."

In the very desperation of fear, the poor man started up and exclaimed, "Major Martin I have assisted you in many frauds and have been made your tool in many infamous transactions, but I will not be made an accomplice

in a murder. I tell you to your face I defy you."

"Neholson," said the Major, "you talk about murder in the style of melodrame."

"I speak of it," replied the lawyer, "with the abhorrence that I feel."

"You are affecting a virtue, which you have not. You know that you are a contemptible villain, and you are aware that I know it. You dread nothing of a crime, but its punishment.—But you are in my power. So I command you to sit down and listen: and if you interrupt me with any more of your tragedy airs I will lay a cane across your shoulders."

The little lawyer almost writhed in agony at the consciousness of his degradation and abjectness. He did not think, when he first lent himself to Major Martin, that he had surrendered himself to a total and irretrievable slavery. He had been long looking upwards

with desiring eyes at the golden fruits of professional success, but they were beyond the reach of his arm, till Major Martin came in his way, and placing for him a ladder of dishonesty helped him to climb, but he hampered him with a rope round his neck, which at the first false step threatened to hang him, and leave him a scarecrow to other thieves. He was completely in the toils of this man who differed from other rogues, by being thoroughly remorseless, and all but gratuitously wicked. Down sat the trembling Nicholson, as calm as despair and cowardice could make him.

“It will be to no purpose to send this boy out of the country again. By the first plan of this kind I was the means of introducing him to his father Sir Edward Vernon, and then when I removed him from Madeira, I find that I sent him into the way of the man who brought him up; and I thought that I had

long ago been rid of him. But he knows nothing of the boy's history, or even of the existence of Sir Edward Vernon. I can see that if there be not already, there soon will be a suspicion and an investigation."

"But there are no means of proof," said Nicholson.

"Perhaps not, but the surest plan will be to rid ourselves of the boy altogether."

"And can you confide in Tom?"

"As I can in you;—by means of his fears and his interest." The Major continued; "We must go into Yorkshire together, and take up our abode at Wakefield which is not many miles from Vernon Park. I know the country. We must from thence communicate with Tom, who will bring the victim into our power, and then we despatch him. When we have reached the scene of our intended exploit,

I will shew you the grave in which he shall be buried."

"If we are detected—" said Nicholson.

"We shall be hanged," said the Major, "and that you shall be, if you flinch from the undertaking."

"But you do not mean to impose on me the task of committing the murder?"

"That will depend on circumstances. I shall expect you to be prepared to do whatever I may command you to do."

"It is no easy matter to lift one's hand against the life of an old companion and friend."

"Nicholson," said the Major very contemptuously, "if you should get out of this scrape without the assistance of Jack Ketch, you had better turn honest, and confine your rogueries to fleecing dowagers, and bilking old maids. You have not head enough to

make your fortune like an honest man, not heart enough to make it by roguery."

The lawyer departed, and meditated in most melancholy guise on the perplexity of his situation. He had before him no means of escape. He was in the hands of one whom he felt to be as much superior to himself in craft and recklessness, as he felt, or fancied, himself to be superior to the rest of the world. As much as a selfish and conceited man can be attached to any one, he had been attached to Frank Atherton; and though, notwithstanding this former friendship, he could calmly and deliberately set himself to rob Frank of his birthright, and could conspire against him, for the purpose of sending him out of the country, or, peradventure, to bring him to an ignominious death; yet he could not bring himself so far to conquer nature, as to feel easy under the prospect of being compelled to mur-

der his friend with his own hand. He was also, as the Major said to him, a bit of a coward. He loved the fruits of blood ; but feared the sight of it ; he sickened at the thought of it, for his own sake, and not for the sake of his probable victim. Moreover he feared failure and detection, and a thousand nameless and undefinable horrors, which were constantly flitting before his mind's eye, and harassing him with ceaseless agitation. He knew too so much of the character of Major Martin, as to be satisfied, that he would not pause at anything, that might stand in the way of his designs, and that he would be very likely, when his work was done, to sacrifice the instrument, with which it had been done. It was too late however to retract, or to break up the partnership of villainy, he was committed, and he must proceed.

Thus musing he returned to his home ; and

in his heart, if not with his lips, did he bitterly curse the domestic finery, of which he once had been so exceedingly proud. The moon was shining according to the best of its metropolitan ability on the bright brass plate on the door, which announced to all the world, that "Mr. Nicholson, Attorney, &c.," dwelt there. He remembered, that when that plate was first fastened there, he had regarded it with a sweet complacency of professional vanity, even though it had been purchased with the wages of iniquity. He looked upon it now, and sighed, wishing it at the bottom of Fleet Ditch, so that he were once out of Major Martin's power. A coxcomical varlet in tawdry livery opened his door to him, and though the time had been when this part of his establishment had been the joy of the heart, and the pride of his soul, yet now the sight was sickening, and a heartless shudder

pervaded his system, while he thought within himself, that for vanity of this kind he had sacrificed his peace, his conscience, and his liberty.

He would fain have slept to banish thought, but he feared to sleep, lest visions, more horrible than reality, should torture his already frightened and cowered spirit. He endeavoured to devise some scheme whereby he might circumvent and thwart his great enemy, or friend, for they mean the same in the combinations of wickedness. Fears for himself made him careful and anxious for Atherton; and he gave himself credit for a high degree of generosity when he wrote the following letter to our hero.

MY DEAR MARTIN,

I AM sorry to inform you, that the circumstance of your having been seen in com-

pany with one of the party concerned in robbing Mr. Lee, of Macclesfield, together with the fact of a fifty pound note, with his name on it, having been traced to your possession, will be likely to bring you into trouble, unless you can contrive to abscond, at least for a time. Knowing the unpleasant situation of your father's affairs, I have not ventured to name the subject to him; and I must request it of you as an especial favour, that you will not name this communication to any one. Secresy and despatch are your only chance of safety. Destroy this letter on the very instant, that you have read it; and then taking leave of your friends in Yorkshire, make the best of your way to London, where you may remain concealed, till you have an opportunity of procuring a passage to India, where, if you will be guided by my advice, you will do well to renew your acquaintance with Mr. Atherton,

who will be better able to promote your interest, than your newly discovered father. Favour me soon with your answer, and tell me when and where I may meet you ; for you must not make your appearance at my office for fear of accidents.

Ever faithful yours,

H. NICHOLSON.

Most unfortunately for Mr. Nicholson, Frank Atherton knew that there was one falsehood in this letter, and therefore, he gave very little heed to the rest. He knew that the fifty pound note, which the Macclesfield grazier had been foolish enough to lose him, had not the name of Lee written upon it ; he had kept the note in his possession long enough, and had looked at it often to know, that no name was written upon it save those, with which it had been issued from the bank. Moreover he

had lost all confidence in Nicholson, whom he more regarded as a tool of Major Martin, and considered to be in league with that gentleman for no very honourable or honest purpose. He looked on this letter therefore only as another link in the chain of treachery, and he resolved not to be influenced or guided by it. Strong in the conscience of his own integrity, he determined that he would no longer submit to be moved as a puppet by the clumsy artifices of this crafty solicitor; and he concluded at once to see Nicholson and to sift the matter thoroughly and completely.

CHAPTER II.

STARTING as at the sight of a spectre, and trembling in every nerve, the patriotic attorney gazed on Frank Atherton and made divers fruitless attempts to stammer out some mystifying lie; but his fears paralyzed his invention, and all that he could do in the way of eloquence was, "B—B—B—Bless m—m—me, Mr. Athert—Martin—Mr.—Mr. who would have thought of seeing you! !" Nicholson had dreamt the night before that he had murdered Atherton, and had scarcely recovered from the fright, when the man himself stood before him.

in propria persona, alive and vigorous, in all the coward-quelling strength of downright honesty and strait forward plain dealing.

Frank saw the little man's confusion. Blind indeed must he have been, if he had not seen it; "Mr. Nicholson," said he carelessly throwing the scrivener's letter on the scrivener's table, "I received this letter from you about three days ago, and how many lies it contains I know not. I have as yet detested but one."

Heat and cold, flushings of anger and paleness of fear made in a few seconds sad havoc with Nicholson's nervous system. The room in which he stood seemed to whirl round with him; he attempted to take up the letter but his arm had scarcely steadiness to reach it and his hand lacked strength to grasp it,

"A lie?—A lie?—A lie?" Nicholson kept repeating the words for a few seconds, as though his will had no command over his lips.

“Yes, Sir,” replied Atherton, “a lie. It is an offensive word to my lips, as it may be to your ears, but your manifest duplicity provokes me to it. Come, Sir,” continued Frank forcing Mr. Nicholson gently into a chair, and taking a seat before him, “if it be possible let me hear a word or two of truth. I am resolved on having this mystery cleared up. There is a mystery, and it is of your making. Solve it you shall or my name—” changing his tone he continued, “my name! alas! I seem destined never to find out what it is. In one word then, do you not know, that my name is not Martin? Do you not know that this claim of Major Martin is altogether a fictitious claim, and are you not acting as his tool to endeavour to get me out of the country?”

Frank waited some moments for an answer; and during that time the terrified lawyer was consulting with his own thoughts, whether he

should cry craven, or take up the tone of the bully. The result of this self-consultation was characteristic of the man, and it produced that indefinite kind of answer called shuffling. Atherton patiently listened for a few minutes to a tangled skein of meaningless words, till, provoked beyond endurance, he exclaimed, "Nicholson, you can deceive me no longer. You have made a market of me, you have sold me. I see it. I see the whole truth, whether you choose to speak it or not. If I have a father living, it is Sir Edward Vernon."

The lawyer affected to sneer, and did his best to get up something like a laugh of derision ; but the effort was too great for him, he could not command either his voice or his features. When the first fright of detection, however, was over, he had presence of mind enough to say, "You the son of Sir Edward

Vernon!—And pray, Mr. Martin, how are you to prove it?”

“ Prove it ?”

“ Yes, Sir,” replied Nicholson a little encouraged by the doubtful tone in which Atherton echoed the words “ Prove it,”—“ Yes, Sir, I say, how can you prove it?—Time has been, Mr. Martin, when you would do me the honor of taking my advice, and if you would be advised by me now, you might find your account in it.”

“ Advised by you, Sir? To what? And for what? Why can you not speak out?—Hear me, Nicholson, you were once my friend, my companion, my almost patron. I had your confidence, and you had mine. But ever since my return to England, and this pretended discovery of my parentage, for I am convinced that it is nothing but pretence, you

have been acting most mysteriously; I have never been able to understand you. And let me tell you, that I will bear it no longer. You have heard my suspicions, and now hear my determination. I am resolved to confront Major Martin and Sir Edward Vernon, and then perhaps I may explode this conspiracy of yours."

Nicholson, who could not yet persuade himself to the candour of a complete acknowledgment, but who felt some little compunction for his treacherous conduct to his former friend and companion, hastily and warmly replied; "Nay, nay, Frank, for your life, I implore you not to think of such a step."

"By all that's good," exclaimed Atherton, "I will bear this feeling no longer. Speak out.—What care I for a life that is spent like mine, in mystery and indefiniteness.—Who am I?—What am I? Answer me like an honest

man, if your professional obliquities have left you any sense of friendship, or any feeling of conscience."

Nicholson was at once softened by the recollection of former friendship, and terrified by the obvious resoluteness of his friend's manner. "Atherton," said he, "my life is in your power, or at least all that is valuable in life. You are merciful;—you will not be my destruction, because I am exposing myself to danger for the purpose of saving you."

"Then tell me the whole truth plainly, and without equivocation. I have no wish to injure any human being, but I am resolute in my determination to ascertain and vindicate my rights."

"I will be candid enough then to say, that I have deceived you;—you are, as you rightly conjecture, not the son of Major Martin;—I believe you to be the son of Sir Edward

Vernon, but I have no proof, nor do I see that any proof can be had. The fear of Major Martin is not, that you should supplant his son by any positive proof, but that, by exciting suspicion, you should deprive him of the means of drawing so largely on the funds of Sir Edward Vernon. The Major begins to see that you have your doubts, and he is resolved on removing you.—You have not seen the Major since you came to town?”

“ I have not.”

“ Then all may be well if you can conceal yourself for awhile.”

“ But where, and how ?—It will not comport with my feelings to live such a skulking life as you recommend. And what is to be the end of it ? What are my prospects ? Here am I excluded from my birthright, supplanted in my inheritance, and prevented from open

and honest exertions to raise myself in society. For what assignable purpose am I to consent quietly to all this ?”

“ To save my life ;” replied Nicholson.

“ Your life is not worth saving,” replied Frank, “ if you make no better use of it than you have done hitherto.”

“ You may well reproach me,” replied the humble scrivener, “ I deserve all that you can say.”

“ It is a pity,” answered Atherton, “ that you had not in good time reproached yourself to save all this repentance and humiliation. You have done me an injury, which you cannot redress, and you have done yourself, it seems, more harm than good.”

Nicholson was at length brought to confess the whole truth by instalments. So our hero found himself now worse than an orphan, or

an anonymous foundling. He had not only no name and no family but he was without hope or prospect. He was deprived even of the pleasant imagination of thinking himself to be in the way of making some delightful discovery. The only discovery, which he had made was, that he was in a situation of hopeless and helpless humility. He could not, under present circumstances, have recourse to his former city friends, without probably endangering the life of Nicholson, or perhaps even his own. And, though in circumstances of great personal anxiety the mind has seldom leisure to think of its sympathies with others, yet Frank could not but think still more affectionately, as still more hopelessly, of Charlotte Vernon.

Atherton, whose mind from a natural and constitutional ingenuousness scarcely suspected

falsehood in anything, that he heard, now having heard such a confession from Nicholson, began to doubt, and distrust every thing, and every body. His confidence was gone; it had lost its hold on the accustomed points, and he knew not whom, or what to rely on. He looked back to his past days, and on examining his impressions, could hardly tell which were from dreams, and which were from facts.

Nicholson, in the zeal of his penitence, and the humility of his fears, offered to him, if he would keep himself concealed, to supply him with any pecuniary aid which he might need, and to provide him with means of making a voyage to Madras, provided he were so disposed. This was the only recompence which the lawyer could make him, and Frank for awhile felt himself disposed to accept of this

peace offering, for he saw no probability of ever establishing his just claim; and he knew that while he stood in the way of so desperate a character as Major Martin his life was not safe.

He believed so much of Nicholson's story, as to credit what he had said of the Major's recklessness and blood thirsty designs. Therefore he gave Nicholson his word that, he would, for the present, keep himself concealed, not shewing himself intentionally to any of his old acquaintance.

Nicholson now was delighted at the prospect, which opened upon him of getting rid of this troublesome business without the dreadful alternative of engaging as an accomplice in a work of blood. Nor was he a little pleased at the thought of having been thus able to outwit the deep and crafty Major. Now began the attorney to enter cordially, to all appear-

ance, into the scheme of Martin for the destruction of Frank ; and he very unresistingly consented to the naming a day for their setting out for Yorkshire.

CHAPTER III.

It has been made sufficiently manifest in the preceding part of this narrative, that the superior knavery and unprincipledness of Major Martin had subdued to his own purposes, and had placed in his power the less talented wickedness of Mr. Nicholson. This lawyer had, by hopes of gain, been led on from one act of dishonesty to another, till he was completely under the command of the Major; for this man was well aware, that he could not, for the full accomplishment of his purposes, calculate on the cooperation of any one, who

was not even as his slave. To this degree of slavery Nicholson had been, by degrees, reduced. But when it had been proposed to him to commit a murder, and that on an old friend and former companion, his feelings revolted; and then, but not till then, did he feel the depth of his moral degradation, and the galling strength of the chains, that bound him. Then did he have recourse to stratagem to save himself and his quondam friend; and then was he still further humbled in finding, that Atherton had sagacity enough to detect him, and spirit enough to encounter him in an attitude of threatening.

When however he found that Atherton was disposed to countenance and assist him, so far as to conceal himself for awhile, a burden was taken off his mind; and he recovered his spirit so far as to consent, without farther reluctance, to accompany Major Martin to Yorkshire.

When the conspirators arrived at Wakefield it was night ; and though Nicholson knew that Atherton was out of their reach, he shuddered at the calmness with which the Major said, " We must now visit the spot where the work is to be done to-morrow night." They walked arm in arm without speaking another word, till they arrived at a narrow lane, which led from the high road into a deep, romantic glen. Before they descended into this glen, the Major pointed out to Nicholson, on the high grounds in the distance, the plantations of Vernon Park ; the white front of the mansion was also visible in the dim light of a clouded moon.

" There," said the Major pointing to the spot, " is Frank's present residence. Now if you walk a few steps farther, I will shew you the place in which we must bury him to-morrow night."

They descended into the glen, which was the same spot where Tom had attempted his cousin's life. There was a steep bank on either side; there was a narrow foot path bounded by a rivulet on one side, and by an abrupt bank on the other;—on the farther side of the rivulet, which was not many inches in depth, nor many yards in width, the ground rose more gradually, and was thickly covered with shrubs.

“Now if you are not afraid of wetting your feet,” said the Major, when they had proceeded about a hundred yards, “follow me, and by this dim light I can shew you a burying place, which will defy detection.”

Nicholson followed as he was bid, wondering at the cold brutality of his guide, and rejoicing in his heart, that their destined victim was far away from them.

“I have known this spot,” said the Major, “from my earliest recollection;—and, even

when I was a boy, I remember that it struck me as being peculiarly well adapted for the purpose, to which we are shortly about to apply it." He paused a few seconds, and then continued, " I wish I had despatched him at Madeira."

" Do you begin to relent ?" said Nicholson with an affectation of courage.

" Relent ?" answered the Major, " no ;—but I tell you I wish the business had been done before.—Do you observe this hillock of sand," continued he moving some brambles away with his cane, " and the cavity on the farther side ?"

" It seems," said Nicholson, " as if it were intended for a grave."

" Hush," said the Major, " I think I hear the chimes of Wakefield church.—To-morrow at this hour it will be all over. Now we must rehearse, that we may be perfect in our parts.

I am afraid you have not nerve enough to stab him with your own hand. What do you think? Can I trust you?"

"I am at your command," said Nicholson with more composure than he could have spoken, had he not known that Atherton was in no danger.

"Then observe," said the Major, "he shall meet us here, at this hour to-morrow.—Your station must be on the footpath opposite; mine shall be where we are now standing. I shall bring a dark lantern with me, and the moment you two meet I will cough and throw the light upon him, and then when he turns round, you will stab him on the back—but mind your aim,—here just at this point."

The lawyer shuddered as the Major put his hand on his back to direct him where to point the dagger.

"And the moment that you strike him I will

rush forward to finish the work.—In four and twenty hours from this time he will be in this grave. The sand is loose, and the interment will give us very little trouble.—Come, now you will be glad of your supper, so let us return to Wakefield.—You show more nerve than I expected. I hope your courage will not fail you to-morrow.”

“I trust not,” said the hypocritical scrivener, who was now inwardly and heartily rejoicing at the thought of being thus able to outwit the Major.

They returned to Wakefield, and took up their abode at a miserable little alehouse on the road side. The people of the house seemed to know the Major, and to stand in awe of him. They were assiduous in their attentions, and obsequious in their obedience.

Nicholson, who was of the city thoroughly and omnivorously, liked not the meagre and

unpromising aspect of the house, for it shewed no symptoms of good cheer. It smelt of cheese and tobacco and sour ale ; and, though there was a blazing fire, the room looked cold with its smoke dried walls and plaistered floor, and wooden chairs and round table on three legs. The sharp air of a Yorkshire midnight had procured him a good appetite, and as he was under no apprehension of witnessing, or contributing to, any bloodshed on this occasion, he was prepared for a better supper, than he supposed was prepared for him. His gorge rose at the sight of a dirty coarse table-cloth, scarcely large enough to cover the miserable apology for a table, and he liked not the looks of iron spoons, and black salt, of brown bread, of pewter-complexioned knives and forks, not over clean, of thick vinegar, and thin mustard, and all the uncomfortable comforts of an ill appointed table.

But to all this he was reconciled by the appearance of a pair of boiled fowls, and a Yorkshire ham, as well cooked, as if they had just emerged from the kitchen at the Mansion House. Instead also of the thin, sour ale, which his fears had anticipated, he had to thank the Major's kind consideration for having provided an ample allowance of bottled stout; and when these had been discussed, a bowl of rum punch redolent of limes made the lawyer's heart glad, and kindled up his courage till he was equal to any exploit, on which his feeder might put him. And, as he was freed from all unpleasant apprehensions, he was in exquisitely high spirits, and thought that the excursion was mightily pleasant, and a very agreeable relaxation from the drudgery of the office.

"Now, Nicholson, our preparations are not quite complete; we must have our writing ap-

paratus, and send the young gentlemen an invitation to meet us. You will write that."

"Most readily," said the lawyer, "but I will charge you six and eight-pence for the job."

Nicholson wrote, at the Major's dictation, as follows :—

MY DEAR MARTIN,

YOU will be surprised to receive a note from me at this place, and under these circumstances. I have deceived you respecting your birth, and have been reluctantly made a tool of Major Martin. But I wish to undeceive you, and to put you into instant possession of means of defeating this man's crafty and villainous designs. By this communication I am running a great risk ; but I cannot be at rest till I have performed this act of justice, and have restored your birthright,

which has been hitherto, by my instrumentality, so unjustly detained from you. We must, however, in this matter, preserve the profoundest secrecy, and you must be ready to conceal my name as an agent in the present act of justice. I write with trembling, for I am in fear lest this deep scheming politician should even now thwart my designs. At present he is far enough off, he is at his house at Hampstead confined by a severe cold ; but, if he should suspect that I am in Yorkshire, he would follow me immediately. Now as I must not be seen in this matter, you and I must meet at midnight. So if you have any real desire of ascertaining your parentage, the present is your only opportunity. Meet me at twelve to-night in the shepherd's glen. Bring this letter in your hand. Of course I need not say that no one must be acquainted with this

communication. You must not fail to meet me, for your destiny depends on it.

Believe me ever faithfully yours,

H. NICHOLSON.

“Very good,” said the Major as Nicholson read the above with an unfaltering voice; “now another bowl of punch, and then to rest; for we have had a fatiguing day. There can be no doubt but he will accept your invitation. We have here expressed his own suspicions, and the temptation will be too strong for him to resist.”

“But supposing,” said Nicholson, “that it should so happen that anything should prevent his giving us the meeting.”

“Why then we must take another opportunity, for I am determined on it. I should have done the deed before. I was a fool to

let him escape me at Madeira. But I have no doubt of his coming."

"I have," thought Nicholson, who put this question only to ascertain, what chance there was of an ultimate escape from this perplexity. The lawyer now began to have some hope, that he might baffle this crafty man; and therefore he felt himself comparatively at ease, and by the dispersion of present fears, and by means of the sedative effects of the punch bowl, he slept soundly till a late hour.

CHAPTER IV.

MAJOR Martin by a messenger on whom he could depend, for he could not altogether trust Nicholson, sent the note up to Vernon Park addressed to Francis Martin, Esq. and so far all seemed to go on rightly as the Major could possibly wish. And nothing but that infatuation, which the allwise ruler of events sometimes suffers to lay hold on the minds of the unprincipled and reckless, can account for the fact, that Major Martin had no suspicion, that he was deceived and circumvented by Nicholson. For this lawyer, who at the first proposal

of the scheme, trembled and turned pale, and struggled to burst his chain, now, when the catastrophe seemed near its development, had grown bold and self-possessed, and contemplated the midnight meeting at the Shepherd's glen with all the calmness of the most callous veteran in deeds of darkness. This excited, however, no suspicion in the mind of Major Martin. On the contrary he rather congratulated himself on the power, which he thus seemed to possess over the soul of his slave.

Days are long to those who are anxiously waiting for night, but the longest day has an end, and anxiety is some time or other lulled to rest. The days at this period were near the shortest, but they appeared long to the Major. At nine the chiming of the bells of Wakefield spire reminded him, that the next time those chimes should ring, his victim would be sinking into a nameless grave.

"Now," said he to his companion "we must fortify our stomachs before we venture out into the cold air."

A handsome supper was served up for them and Nicholson was heedless of pewter knives. He almost laughed to think of the dexterity, with which he had taken pains to convert an intended tragedy into a mere farce of disappointment. He spared not the punch which his employer pressed upon him, and while Martin urged him to drink for the purpose of keeping up his courage, he took the recommendation, for the purpose of keeping out the cold.

At length they set out on their expedition; and at least half an hour before the time appointed, they reached the Shepherd's glen.

"Now Nicholson," said the Major, "if you go cleverly through your work, your fortune is made."

"We are too soon," answered the lawyer.

"So much the better. We shall go more coolly about our work."

The moon, which was then high, gave but occasional gleams of misty light through masses of dense and slowly moving clouds threatening snow. There was light enough, however, to let them see the entrance of the glen towards Vernon Park. The minutes went slowly, but they went. The chimes at length were heard, they were playing the old air of the miller of Mansfield; the melody came dismally on the breeze, and by this time the fumes of the punch were evaporating from the brains of the lawyer, and he grew tired of waiting for nothing.—Minutes went.

"He is late," said Nicholson.

"All in good time," said the Major, "perhaps they sup late at Vernon Park."—Then after a pause—"Now to your place and I to

mine. I think I see him coming.—Can you grasp the dagger firmly—Let me see—Ay that will do.—Now no flinching.”

Nicholson trembled in spite of himself, for if the scene were nothing else, it was a well acted passage of melodrama.

“We must be careful not to make a mistake,” said Nicholson with an effort of levity, “and murder some poor innocent shepherd in his midnight wanderings.”

“Hush, hush,” said the Major, “he is here.”—So saying, he stepped hastily across the little stream and took his station among the shrubs and brambles, that shaded and shrouded the meditated grave.—Nicholson, who thought there was a mistake. looked fearlessly and enquiringly towards the entrance of the glen, where by the moon’s scanty light he saw that, which sent the blood rushing through his veins in tumultuous torrents of almost

madness. It was to his eye in form and aspect, in attitude, in dress, in gait, no other than Atherton himself. The paper was in his hand which he seemed to brandish and display as a signal to his midnight informant. In an instant the lawyer's courage, if courage it might be called, sank down in absolute and agonizing cowardice and dread. Rushing through the rivulet, he threw himself trembling like a beaten spaniel at the feet of his master, and exclaimed in convulsive emotion, "I cannot—I cannot—oh mercy!—"

The Major kicked him contemptuously away, and seizing the dagger from a hand that willingly relinquished it, sprang to the other side of the glen; while Nicholson lay trembling on the ground with his face averted from the scene. In an instant the lawyer heard a stab, a sob, and a struggle, and turning round instinctively, he saw the Major and his victim

rolling in the stream of water now deeply tinged with the blood of the wounded man.

“ Help, help, contemptible coward,” were the first words uttered by the Major. So saying he lifted up his hand aiming another blow at his victim, when his arm was arrested by a voice, not of Atherton, but of the Major’s own son, exclaiming, “ Father, my Father, mercy, mercy !”

The Major started, Nicholson was horror struck, and felt infinitely more than the murderer himself. “ How—What means this ?” exclaimed the father lifting his wounded son, and dropping the instrument of murder.—“ Speak, boy, speak, what madness brought you here ?”

Faintly and feebly as one who feels life ebbing fast away the young man replied, ‘ It was not madness—it was the letter—the treacherous letter—I saw Nicholson’s handwriting

—on this letter—to my cousin—I opened it—
oh—water—water—I—he is gone—” The
Major and Nicholson now understood; but it
was too late. The latter had at least the satis-
faction of having saved the life of Atherton;
but the Major had blood upon his hand and
despair in his heart. He had reached the climax
of crime, and he heard as the knell of his de-
parting hopes the last groan of his murdered
son. The lifeless body sunk from his relaxed
arms, and Nicholson and the Major stood en-
tranced as it were, gazing with an ignorant and
indefinite feeling at the miserable sight before
them.

The clouds rolled away and left the clear
bright moon in the placid depths of heaven
shedding the fulness of its midnight lustre on
a sight from which humanity is wisely formed
to revolt with horror. The slaughtered youth
had fallen in the water, his face was turned

towards his unnatural father, his cold hand yet grasped the letter, by which he had been betrayed into a snare not intended for him.

The Major for a moment thought of evidence, and stooped to wrench the attesting document from the senseless hand that held it, but the effort was too much even for him. He started back with an involuntary shudder, and his faculties were again suspended. Feeling, in its best and proper sense, belonged not to the Major's mind. He passed at once from a state of the coolest indifference to the bewilderment of scarcely conscious stupor, without experiencing the agony of a passionate transition. Never had he been habituated in the whole course of his life to enter by sympathy into the feelings of others, and nothing could touch him, save through the medium of selfishness. Now there lay before him in his murdered boy, the death of his hopes, the reward

of his crimes, the defeat of his craftiness, the consummation of his guilt;—and the sight shook him, not indeed to a wholesome agony of remorse, but to the temporary dethronement of his reason and a partial suspension of consciousness.

Nicholson on the other hand, whose wickedness was the vanity of mental weakness, and the selfsatisfied pride, which is gratified by paltry distinction, and who had not risen to the sublimity of reckless and heartless apostacy, felt not only for the sad spectacle before him, but for the torture which he supposed must wring the soul of one who had stained his hands with the blood of his own child. Fluent as Nicholson usually was, and ever ready as on ordinary occasions he might be with the gabbling impertinence of fruitless advice, or pointless consolation, he was now wisely and necessarily speechless. It was no case for

pity expressible by words, it admitted not of compassion, it was a depth beyond the reach of consolation, it was a crime beyond the palliation of an accomplice.

Nicholson had in his constitution merely the villainy of want of principle; his was not the stern and hard hearted recklessness which can look calmly on the work of its wickedness. He could have sacrificed or betrayed for selfish purposes his best friend, but he had not nerve enough to look on the work of his own devices, or the horrible result of his own schemes; and he had not sufficient imagination to place before the eye of his mind scenes acted at a distance. It was the sight now before him that shook him to the inmost soul and he was so paralysed with fear and revolting of spirit that as an accomplice he was useless and worse than useless.

When the Major had recovered a little from

the first shock of the dreadful discovery of his awful error, he said to Nicholson, "We must bury the body."

But Nicholson stood petrified with horror, feeble and purposeless as an infant.

"Help me," said the Major, stooping down and raising the body partly from out the water in which it had fallen. Nicholson in a bewilderment of trembling fear instinctively attempted to obey that voice to which he had been habituated to yield subjection; but when he brought his arms in contact with the murdered youth, his strength vanished and he drew back.

"What now," exclaimed the Major as contemptuously as if he were speaking to a dog.

"Oh I cannot,—I cannot—"

"Fool;" replied the Major and fixing his terrific looks on the trembling companion of his wicked exploit he raised his arm and aimed

a blow at Nicholson with the very dagger that had pierced the bosom of his son. But Nicholson, however he might lack presence of mind in great emergencies, where he might be serviceable to others, was not at all deficient in this quality, when his own safety was at stake. Dexterously he evaded the blow, the meditated force of which brought the Major to the earth: and now consulting his safety and trembling for his life, which he saw to be in danger from the poignard of his companion, as well as from the halter of justice, he fled, and left the unnatural father to bury by himself the murdered son.

CHAPTER V.

LET the narrative now follow the steps of Atherton, who in a spirit of dejection that he had never felt before, left the office of Nicholson with a promise that he would not shew himself to his friends, but remain concealed till some safe steps could be taken for his provision and protection.

He soon found it however impossible to fulfil his promise to the letter ; for a week or two after on descending Holborn-hill, he was suddenly and unexpectedly accosted by his friend Mr. Plush. Atherton, who was walking

slowly and pensively along, was roused from his reverie by the sound of a heavy shuffling step close behind him, and by the weight of a muscular hand pressing mercilessly on his shoulder, and looking round he saw the well known features of the reverend frequenter of the Pewter Platter.

“Odzooks, Master Atherton or Martin or whatever your name may be, I thought we were never to see you again. So you have discovered your father, a Major in the army. Has he any livings in his gift?”

“Really, Sir,” said Atherton after a moment’s pause, in which pause the young man sighed and looked sorrowful, “I cannot answer for what Major Martin may have in his gift.”

“Ah! Well I see how it is,” replied Mr. Plush, “you are a great man now and are ready to forget old acquaintances. Well, well

I ask pardon for the liberty I have taken ; but when one has been journeyman so many years as I have, it is natural to be looking out for promotion ; and it is always my way, I say, not to lose anything for want of asking."

"Sir," replied Atherton with some emotion, for he was ~~very~~ sorry that he had unintentionally wounded the poor man's feelings, "you mistake me if you think that I have forgotten my old friends, or that I am capable of behaving with wilful and deliberate unkindness to any one ; but I have much on my mind at present. I am miserably out of spirits."

"Ah," exclaimed Mr. Plush, recovering the tone of his familiarity, "I see how it is, I know all about it. A love matter, a love matter. Ay, ay, I was once in love myself. Never mind. All's well that ends well.—But now Master Atherton, zooks I can never call you anything but Atherton;—I am going to

read prayers at St. Andrews, it won't take above a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, if you will just pop in with me, we can afterwards adjourn to my lodgings and eat a mutton chop together. Then we can talk over old times."

Atherton, who knew not ~~what~~ to do with himself, was not reluctant to accept of Mr. Plush's invitation, and he accompanied the reverend gentleman into the church, wondering at the slovenly and disrespectful style in which things sacred were treated by one whose business it was to recommend and enforce them on the public attention.

"Sit where you like," said Mr. Plush, "you will find plenty of room."—So saying his reverend guide disappeared for a moment, and before Atherton had well settled himself in a pew he heard the sonorous voice of Mr. Plush reverberating from the lofty roof and

echoing walls, along which the words of prayer seemed to be coursing each other with most indecorous haste. Every now and then, but not in the intervals of Mr. Plush's reading, for that gentleman made no pauses, the voice of the mechanically responding parish clerk was heard in a *sotto voce* accompaniment blending, but not harmoniously, with the galloping gabble of the indefatigable reader. This species of performance, whatever may be said by poetical people about echoing vaults and pealing notes, was by no means calculated to soothe the perturbations of a troubled mind, nor was it the kind of religious ministration, which could wean the spirit from the perplexing interests of human life. But occasionally Atherton thought that he heard another voice, besides those of parson and clerk: and the voice was as of one, with whom he had been acquainted, but he had forgotten the when and

the where. It was a voice, deep, rough and solemn, trembling with earnestness, consecrating, and consecrated by, the language of prayer which it uttered. He directed his eye to the place from whence the voice came, and there he saw his worthy and venerable friend Dr. Johnson, the only individual in the place who seemed to have any idea of the purpose for which he was there. So rivetted was Atherton with the devotional aspect of the doctor's countenance, that he withdrew not his looks from him till the brief service was concluded.

When the service was over Mr. Plush was in a twinkling dismantled of his surplice, and they two proceeded to the door, where Dr. Johnson said to Atherton, "Young man, if you should ever go into a place of worship again, let me advise you to attend to your own

devotion, and not to interrupt that of others by an unseemly and idle gazing."

Atherton was about to apologize, but the doctor, who did not seem to recognize him, turned on his heel and walked away.

"He does not recollect me," said Atherton to Mr. Plush.

"Very likely not," answered his clerical friend, "he is a strange sort of man. To tell you the truth I don't half like him. He behaved very rudely to me some time ago. I had been reading prayers at St. Dunstan's, and there was no one in the church, but Dr. Johnson, and a few old women. As we were all coming out together I spoke to the doctor, who, instead of returning my salutation, said loud enough to be heard from Temple Bar to Fleet Ditch, 'Who taught you to read the church service?'—So being a little piqued I replied, 'I taught myself, Sir.'—'Then,

Sir, I hope you will never teach any one else;—was his reply, which I think was exceedingly rude.”

“ Exceedingly rude indeed, I think,” echoed Atherton, “ but this is not the only instance I have noticed of moroseness connected with devotion. I remember that Mrs. Dickinson, who was a very religious woman in her way, was always in an ill humour on Sundays. I should like to know the philosophy of it.”

“ Philosophy,” said Mr. Plush, “ odzooks, I see no philosophy in it for my part ;—if any one has reason to be in an ill humour about prayers, I am sure I have ; for what with Sunday and week day duty and burials and christenings and marriages, I am always at it, like a horse in a mill ; but it never puts me out of humour. I tell you what, Master Atherton, my notion of the matter is, that being out of humour answers no one good purpose in the

world. Why if in addition to all my troubles and toils and wearisome life I were to be in ill humours everlastingly, I might as well go hang myself at once. To be in good spirits is all the comfort I have."

"It is happy for you, Sir," replied Atherton, "that you have so much philosophy and good sense as to reason thus."

"Bah—bah—," replied Mr. Plush, "don't tell me about reason and philosophy. I know nothing about philosophy or reason ; I merely make the best of whatever comes. And that you must do if you take your mutton chop with me to-day: for I have no kickshaws or made dishes such as you meet at your great folks' houses in Broad Street. Not that I don't like good living, Master Atherton, I like it as well as any man, but then I need not be at the expense of it at home. No, no I come in now and then for a tolerably good blow out at other

people's expense. Sometimes I get a dinner at the Mansion-house, and I seldom pass a month without an invitation to some tavern dinner, where my share of the reckoning is to say grace before meat, and the singers do the job for me afterwards by singing *Non nobis*."

"I suppose," said Atherton with a smile, "you would have no objection if they would sing before dinner as well as after and make your place a perfect sinecure."

"Nay, nay, good Master Atherton," replied Mr. Plush, "I would much rather take the trouble to say a short grace, than undergo the annoyance of hearing a long song that would cool the fish."

Hereupon they arrived at the lodgings of the Reverend Mr. Plush. And presently that personage, whom Mr. Plush in his moments of facetiousness used to call his old woman, made her appearance. This domestic, the

whole and sole of Mr. Plush's establishment was a short broad, round shouldered, flat faced individual, with one of those complexions, which by their hardness seemed destined to last for ever, the elements of that complexion were soot, sauff and wrinkles. But the old lady was happy in the consciousness of her importance, as ruling over the whole empire of Mr. Plush's lodgings, though her dominion was rather equivocal, seeing that Mr. Plush was not much governed by her, and she herself was not much under her own command, as to the management of her flippant tongue, which having lost the guard of teeth, seemed thereby exposed to every wind that blew, and was consequently in constant agitation as the leaf of an aspen.

"Ods bobs, mistress, is not dinner ready?" exclaimed the reverend Mr. Plush.

"Dinner ready, forsooth! I should like to

know who is to cook you a dinner, while you are reading prayers at St. Andrews—Why it will not be ready yet this half hour. I thought you had been going to preach a sermon this morning.”

“ And if I had,” replied Mr. Plush, “ it would not have taken me half an hour. Look ye, old lady, I don’t like to be kept waiting for my dinner. One does not know what to do with oneself before dinner.”

“ No, nor after neither,” replied the impertinent, “ but I’ll pop over to the Magpie and order the beer and get you the paper, if you will step into the kitchen the while and see that the meat does not burn.”

Atherton smiled at the placidity with which Mr. Plush complied with the proposal of his housekeeper ; but Atherton had before seen the establishment of a bachelor, and the influence of a female domestic in the house of his

quondam master Mr. Bryant; though it did not seem very likely that Mr. Plush would altogether follow the stationer's example in raising his servant to the dignity of actual, legal, wedded mistress of his establishment.

“That is one of the strangest and queerest creatures that ever lived,” said Mr. Plush returning from the kitchen with a tumbled and beer sopped newspaper in his hand, “but she is a faithful servant, and so I let her have her own way.—But stay, let us see what's the news.—Ah here is another of Junius' letters.—A troublesome blade is this Master Junius. I cannot say I like such discontented chaps. If people are not satisfied with government, let them go elsewhere and see if they can find a better.—Let them go to France and eat frogs and wear wooden shoes.—Let them go to Spain and take a taste of the inquisition.—Or let them go to Constantinople, and make trial of

the tender mercies of the grand Turk, that's my notion Mr. Atherton, that's my notion and a good notion it is: it has stood the test of ages."

Mr. Plush thus continued talking over the paper, sometimes reading half a paragraph almost aloud and then muttering the rest to himself much to the annoyance of his companion. Frank's political fever had considerably abated, since the evening that he had met Mr. Plush and Mr. Nicholson at the house of Mr. Robert Bryant; so that he paid very little attention to the miscellaneous mutterings of his clerical host, and was suffering himself to sink into a reverie when suddenly the reverend gentleman started up in a fit of loudly expressed astonishment, exclaiming, "Impossible! Impossible!"—Then stalking across the room in a tremulous agitation, he thrust the paper into the hands of Frank, saying, "There, there,

Mr. Atherton, Mr. Martin, or whatever your name may be, read that.—Oh that I should ever have lived to smoke a pipe with a murderer.”

“ A murderer, Mr. Plush, what do you mean ?” cried Atherton, whose active imagination immediately suggested to him the probability of what had really taken place. He took the paper and read as follows :—

“ It is a painful duty to lay before the public the particulars, as far as we have been able to collect them, of the most horrid, barbarous and cruel murder, unparalleled in the annals of atrocity. On Wednesday last as a pedlar who was on his way from Wakefield to Halifax was passing through the shepherd’s glen, which leads towards Vernon Park, he observed that his dog was attracted by something extraordinary on the opposite side of the rivulet that runs through the glen. And as the man

could not by any means get the dog away from the spot, he was induced to make an examination, and on moving some loose sand, which had been partly disturbed by the dog scratching it up with his feet, the man was thunderstruck at the sight of a human hand grasping a letter. By the exertions of the pedlar the body was completely disinterred. Information was immediately communicated to the magistrates who happened to be then sitting at Wakefield. The most active measures are taken to discover the perpetrators of this diabolical deed of darkness."

"Well Sir!" exclaimed Atherton.

"Read on, Mr. Atherton," replied the clergyman.

Atherton read on and soon came to an explanation of the agitation of Mr. Plush, for on reading, "Farther particulars" he found that "a person calling himself Nicholson had

been taken up under very suspicious circumstances," and that this individual "calling himself an attorney, had betrayed such manifest symptoms of agitation that very little doubt was entertained, that he was in some way or other connected with this diabolical catastrophe." Still farther Atherton read as follows: "We stop the press to announce, that Nicholson has confessed that he was privy to the murder; but what more passed at the last examination we do not feel ourselves at liberty to state, lest we might thereby prejudice the cause of justice. The event has excited an unusual sensation through the county and our office is daily and hourly besieged with enquiries."

"I see it all," said Atherton, as he laid down the paper, "I see it all, Mr. Plush," continued he looking earnestly on his friend, "they have mistaken their victim. I was to have been the murdered person."

The very thought of seeing a man who might have been murdered, was to Mr. Plush almost as terrific as seeing one who had been murdered, and he started and looked fearfully upon Atherton, as if to see if he were really living.

"Mercy on me Mr. Martin—"

"Never call me by that name again," replied Atherton with a solemnity of tone and a look of disgust, that quite discomposed Mr. Plush, who in an ordinary way had very little to do with emotions, and was mightily disturbed by anything that interrupted the sluggish current of his mechanical life.

"Why so, why so?" exclaimed the clergyman.

"I will tell you," said Atherton, "I have no secrets now. You shall hear a tale Mr. Plush—"

"Well, well, well, stop, stop, stop, after dinner if you please," replied Mr. Plush who

at that moment saw his housekeeper bringing a dish of mutton chops into the room and was fearful lest a terrible story might spoil his dinner or that a long one might cool it. After they had dined Atherton narrated his history, as far as he knew it and as far as Mr. Plush knew it not.

"Well," replied Mr. Plush, "I certainly did think that fellow Nicholson capable of any thing, but I little thought of his carrying his iniquity so far as to be guilty of murder. That is too bad. Pick a man's pocket, you may repay him; insult him you may beg his pardon, and all is right again; but murder admits no apology or amends."

Atherton had never regarded Mr. Plush in the light of a counsellor and therefore he did not in the present emergency ask of him any advice but rather took counsel of his own thoughts. Many were the topics on which

those thoughts were now distractingly exercised. All those for whom and in whom he was interested, must necessarily be thrown into serious and deep concern by the event which had taken place. And it was possible, that by this circumstance, horrible as it was in itself, he might be placed in that situation which of right belonged to him. But as his disposition was not such as to have led him to do a dishonourable or injurious action for the sake of any personal benefit, so it would not suffer him to rejoice in the evil which had been done, though it might appear to contribute to his advantage. Less than human would he have been not to feel deeply and painfully for the dreadful situation into which Nicholson had thrown himself; and more than human would he have been did it not now occur to him that an obstacle was removed which had stood between him and prosperity. But when

he considered the desperate and heartless character of Major Martin he thought, that in the vindictiveness of his spirit he might carry the secret with him to the gallows, and to the grave, especially since if convicted of the murder he would be most anxious to conceal from the world the revolting truth, that he had shed the blood of his own son.

CHAPTER VI.

NOT many days before the horrid event related above, Mr. Vernon and his daughter had left Vernon Park for London, and not many days after their arrival in London, Mr. Vernon received a letter from Sir Edward Vernon announcing the sudden death of his son, and intimating that farther particulars would speedily be communicated which it would be exceedingly desirable to keep from the knowledge of Miss Vernon. These farther particulars having been already stated, need not be repeated here ; it suffices to say that Mr. Vernon knew them

by this letter, but there was a postscript to the letter which it is essential to the narrative to insert.

“ There is a mystery about this affair which I am anxious, yet afraid to investigate. I would not mention the matter at all, but there is a rumour to that purpose in so many lips, that I shall give it little farther publicity by naming it to you. The rumour is that our young friend, the son of Major Martin, was a party concerned in the dreadful transaction. When my poor boy's body was discovered, a letter was found in his hand addressed to young Martin, by Nicholson, who has already been taken up for the murder. This letter has been concealed from me of course, and is now in the possession of the clerk of the peace. It was in consequence of a letter from this Mr. Nicholson, as you may remember, that young Martin left us so abruptly, and it is very re-

markable that we have heard nothing from him since. The dreadful affair has so unhinged me that I scarcely know what I write.

“ E. V.”

On the receipt of this letter, and on perusing the postscript especially, Mr. Vernon was thrown into an agitation rather unusual for him. Of these two brothers little has been said in the course of the narrative, descriptive or strongly discriminative ; but they were men, though both of good disposition and good understanding, of very different character and temperament both essentially and accidentally. Sir Edward Vernon was kind and gentle, candid and unsuspicious, of great courtesy of manner, well informed, and in some measure discriminating, but not altogether without some little leaning to credulity;—apt, from the goodness of his heart, to have his understanding occasionally blinded and sophistically

misled. He was a man of tender feelings, but not of strong purpose, and if there was a point of weakness about him, it was the undue estimation in which he held the minutiae of what he considered to belong to the deportment and bearing of a gentleman; but he was not a coxcomb, and never had been, even in his younger days, for his habitual and almost excessive courtesy by the expressing consideration from others, kept away from his own mind any flattering or conceited notions of himself.

Now Mr. Vernon, of Broad Street, was the merchant *par excellence*, gentleman enough in all reason, but shrewd and penetrating, perhaps somewhat conceited of his shrewdness, conscientious, punctilious beyond most men of his class, open and candid in his bearing, but not deficient in self possession; he had been well educated, and had not neglected

literature, and he esteemed highly those of cultivated and discriminating mind. Dr. Johnson, as we have seen, was in high esteem with him. The point in which Mr. Vernon differed most from his brother was, in credulity. Mr. Vernon possessed a kind of social scepticism, partly constitutional, and partly professional; he had seen enough of both sides of human character not to confide in the first appearance. Yet there had been in the conduct and bearing of Atherton something that had made an unusually favorable impression on the merchant's mind; for knowing by experience that there did exist in humanity, and especially in its earlier days, a generous, hearty and free integrity of spirit, manifesting itself in the movements and looks, he imagined, very strongly imagined that he had seen such symptoms in the character of Atherton; and was therefore not very ready to

believe anything that made against him. But again on second thoughts, having some knowledge, by report, of the not over reputable character of Nicholson, and knowing that Atherton had been intimate with Nicholson, having also in his recollection some floating idea of a rumour of some gambling transaction in which the parties had been engaged, he knew not what to think.

Under this impression he bethought him to call as if accidentally on Mr. Robert Bryant of whom he might make enquiry without any manifest symptoms of suspicion. He called and enquired, but heard no intelligence, or rather he heard what was not favourable; for Mr. Robert Bryant said, that all he had heard of Mr. Martin, by which name Atherton of course still passed among his friends, was that he had been in Yorkshire and that he was seen

a few weeks ago at the office of Mr. Nicholson, since which time he had not been visible to any of his friends. "Indeed," added Mr. Bryant, "as I felt an interest in Mr. Martin I made it a point to enquire about him as soon as I heard that he was in town and I found that not one of his friends had seen him. I also enquired of the people of the house where he used to lodge but could gain no tidings of him."

This was enough to satisfy Mr. Vernon, that there was something not quite right, but he could not very easily be brought to believe that such an amiable and well disposed young man as the supposed son of Major Martin should ever be guilty of so revolting a deed as that ascribed to him in the rumour alluded to in the postscript to Sir Edward Vernon's letter. Circumstantial evidence, however, when it

grows cumulative has a kind of force like that of the screw or wedge overcoming resistance effectually, because gradually.

Atherton, when he had left Mr. Plush, who by the way was ignorant of the name of the person murdered, retired to the miserable lodging which he had taken for the purpose of concealment in the neighbourhood of Tower-hill. There revolving in his mind the critical situation in which he was placed he endeavoured to meditate on the steps which he might most advisedly take. He felt a reluctance to make his retreat known to any of his old acquaintance or to consult with them, because he must be under the necessity of mentioning the name of Nicholson and must miserably remind himself of his quondam and recent intimacy with a man whose character at the best was indifferent and was now labouring under the

imputation of the darkest and deadliest charge that can be brought against a man.

There was no longer a doubt in Atherton's mind that he was indeed the son of Sir Edward Vernon ; but at the same time there was not a gleam of hope that the relationship could be proved. No proof indeed could be had of it save through means of Major Martin's own confession, and he, Atherton supposed, had laid his schemes too deeply ever to be apprehended, or if apprehended was not likely to disclose the truth. Instances had been where detected villains by an instinct of justice, or convulsion of disappointment, having no more to dread, had acknowledged all and even more than all that had been proved against them ; but this was not likely to be the case with Major Martin who had never during the whole of Atherton's acquaintance with him shewn the slightest symptom of feeling or emotion, and was to all

appearance the last man in the world to be touched with remorse. Beside if the man had any feeling, would he acknowledge that he had murdered his own son?—and if he had not any feeling what could move him to an act of justice?—or even if disposed might he not lack the means of proving the point?

These considerations weighed heavily on our hero's mind and there was blended with them another consideration, viz. that in a few days he might hear that his old acquaintance and companion had been convicted of murder, and it would not be pleasant to be recognized as the once companion and familiar friend of a convicted criminal. Then also if Major Martin had been, as there seemed little doubt, an accomplice if not a principal in the crime, he could never make his appearance in England and it would not be likely after the discoveries that might result from Nicholson's trial that

Major Martin should recognize Atherton as entitled to any protection from him, and so there was no home, no hope, no friend, no refuge for him in England.

In this emergency it was natural that he should turn the anxiety of his thoughts towards his plain, honest, simple, unsophisticated friend at Madras, the Mr. Atherton whose name he bore, whose kindness he had experienced and whose patronage had been so generously offered to him.

In the dusk therefore he emerged from his dingy dwelling, and betook himself to a public house in the Minories, in order that he might get sight, if possible, of some newspaper, from whence he might learn something of vessels about to sail for Madras. He felt himself not very comfortable when, seated, with the paper before him, he heard some rough and loud voices in the next box, talking of the

dreadful murder that had been committed in Yorkshire. For this event filled the minds of all, to the exclusion even of politics. It was sadly annoying to him to hear men, who, from their manner of speaking, were evidently of the lowest and most brutalized part of the species talking of Nicholson, as though they had been familiar with him, and giving him a character which, with all its exaggeration, bore the aspect of truth.

Atherton could with difficulty fix his attention on the paper sufficiently to read the advertisements, which were dancing before his eyes in a perplexing maze. He hardly knew where to look for what he wanted to see, for he was afraid that in his search his eyes might light on what would rend his soul with horror. And though he had no other legitimate cause of agitation than sympathy or sorrow, yet he

felt, as if there was upon his heart the burden of guilt.

With much ado, and after long searching, he found that there was a vessel about to sail for Madras in a few days. He hastily and tremblingly took a note of the references, and was about to depart, when a sailorlike looking man of apparently higher rank than a common sailor, but not quite polished enough, even in those rude days, to claim, by his appearance, the denomination of Captain, came and placed himself in the box where Atherton was sitting, and with a hasty "By'r leave," seized hold of the paper, and as Atherton was about to leave the box at the same moment, the stranger called out, "Hollo, my hearty, no offence I hope."

"None at all," replied Atherton who persisted in the movement to depart.

“ Then don’t be in such a plaguy hurry to get under weigh. Come, man, tack about and sit down again. Why you have had nothing to drink, or you have swallowed your mug.”

Atherton recollected that he had violated the implied laws of the public house by spelling over the paper with dry lips: and at the recollection felt confused for his absence of mind. The stranger observing this said, “ What say you to a bowl of punch, young gentleman ?”

“ I am not much accustomed to punch,” replied Atherton.

“ Then it is high time you should learn,” said the other.

Atherton was not in a frame of mind to be otherwise than passive, and he complied with the invitation and resumed his sitting, though he did not much admire his new companion.

“ Pretty doings here ashore,” said the sailor, “ here is a precious story of a murder.”

Atherton almost sighed. He had been more than saturated with the subject. But in spite of his teeth he was under the necessity of undergoing the whole story again, and bearing the rude, ignorant commentaries of his uncouth companion. The punch was brought. Atherton sipped: His companion guzzled. Sipping did little, but guzzling did much.

“What say you to another?” And forthwith another was brought, and the sipping and guzzling proceeded as before. The sailor read the paper, and now and then looked at Atherton, who was too much taken up with his own thoughts to mind these looks; and indeed he who looked, had that twinkle in his eye which rendered the aim of his sight very imperfect, and nearly deprived him of the power of steady scrutiny.

“It is an ill wind that blows nobody good,” said the stranger at last—“what another howl

out !—But I say, Master, it is an ill wind that blows nobody good. Why lookee—here is a reward of five hundred pound—'pon my word—
—a pretty reward—punch all out—I would not though for all the five hundreds in the world—but I'll tell you what, look here, here is a 'scription—six feet—that's about your height I guess—well, well, don't stand up, I aint going to accuse you—there's many a pretty fellow that's six feet high,—high forehead—blue eyes—ac-ac-ac—what's that—acquiline nose—what's an aquiline nose—blow me if ever I saw such a thing—though I have seen as many noses as most people—African noses—and Yankee noses and Chinese noses, though they hardly deserve the name of noses—answer to the name of Atherton—or Martin—alias—what's alias—alias Jackson—alias Watkins—any objection to another bowl—upon my word, my hearty, I like your notions

—five hundred pounds reward—lodged in any gaol in his majesty's dominions—long life to his majesty, 'though he owes me six months' pay—we'll drink his health if you please."

"With all my heart," replied Atherton, who began to see that his volunteer companion was rather muzzed with his warm drink; and considering all circumstances, Frank was not sorry for it; he perceived by what had been read in the paper, that it was now more than ever important that he should keep himself concealed, and get out of the country as fast as possible.

As soon therefore as the punch had settled the sailor's senses in forgetfulness, Frank was glad to pay the reckoning that he might depart uninterruptedly.

When he was again ensconced in the snug retreat of his dirty lodgings, where he felt as though he could bid defiance to the detective

powers of all the descriptive advertisements in the world, he bethought himself that it would now be desirable that he should disguise himself completely, and court the obscurity of another alias.

It was very evident from the nature of the advertisement that it must have been got up by, or under the direction of Major Martin, since none but he knew the alias of Watkins; unless he might have named it to Nicholson, who after having given himself much trouble, and put himself to some expence to save his friend's life, would hardly now plot against him.

Some consolation now was it to Atherton's mind that he knew his danger and knew his enemy. He was in no fear of any serious danger from the advertisement, but it was not pleasant to anticipate that such charge should or might be made against him; and indeed he

felt that it would not be very easy to bring reputable witnesses even to prove an *alibi* if he were driven to such extremity. For it would seem strange in the eyes of the Vernon family, that he should be able only to prove his existence in London by the testimony of a vulgar and low individual, keeper of a dirty lodging house in an obscure and dirty part of the metropolis.

Whatever doubt therefore had possessed his mind before concerning the desirableness and advisableness of emigration, he was now confirmed in the idea that it was the only safe and prudent step that he could take. The disguise of his person was not difficult, and the change of his name was perfectly easy, for he had been accustomed to such a variety, that he hardly knew his own.

CHAPTER VII.

ATHERTON, after having, as he thought, sufficiently disguised himself to escape recognition from ordinary observers, betook himself to the office, to which the advertisement had directed him, to secure himself a passage to Madras. This office was up three pair of stairs in a building that was let out for offices of various descriptions ; and in coming down the narrow staircase, which, though generally dark, was unfortunately rather too light at the only turning, that enjoyed a window, he met

Mr. Vernon. They might have passed, but for the moment Frank forgot his disguise, and stopped, as if about to address the worthy merchant. In the next instant however, bethinking himself that he was acting out of character, he contradicted his intention, and was proceeding without speaking, but the movement had drawn Mr. Vernon's attention, who fixing his eyes enquiringly on the young man presently recognized Atherton's features, and comparing these symptoms with what he had heard, began to fear that there might be some truth in the rumours alluded to in his brother's letter; for at this time he had not seen the advertisement by which Atherton had been so alarmed at the public house in the Minories.

“ Bless me Mr. Martin, is it you ? ”

Atherton found that he could not carry on the deception successfully with Mr. Vernon, and he pleaded guilty to the charge of identity.

"You left us very abruptly at Vernon Park," said Mr. Vernon, "you have heard of course of the melancholy event that has taken place since that time?"

"I have Sir," replied Atherton trembling while he spoke.

"And you know also, I presume, that an individual who once had the honor of your acquaintance is implicated in the dreadful transaction?"

"From that individual, answered Atherton, "I have received injuries which perhaps neither he nor any other human being can countervail.—You are astonished to see me in this disguise. You would be more astonished, could I feel myself at liberty to tell you my history. But unfortunately I have no other voucher for my veracity than my own word."

"The time was," said Mr. Vernon, "that I could take it."

“The time will be I trust, when you can and must take it again. I am driven to disguise my outward appearance because I cannot let the world see my heart; for the world is welcome to every thought and every recollection that is there.”

Mr. Vernon could not imagine that he was talking to a murderer or even to the companion of a murderer. His opinions of the young man had always been honorable to him; and even now that there was something mysterious in the circumstance of the disguise, that mystery did not impress Mr. Vernon unfavourably, but it troubled and puzzled him, and when a man of penetration, who is rather proud of his penetration, is puzzled, he is not pleased. He parted from Atherton without pursuing his enquiries, so as to afford any idea of suspicion.

With a heavy heart, not unburdened of

tender thoughts of her, whom he had first and only loved, Atherton now returned to his miserable lodgings. He had been at the meeting with Mr. Vernon somewhat disturbed, knowing the horrid suspicion which had been excited ; but when he parted from that gentleman, probably for the last time, he thought afresh of all his past ambitions and pleasing hopes, and he was glad of the prospect of a melancholy solitude, wherein he might indulge his despairing thoughts.

But in his lodgings, instead of solitude, he found the poor distracted and miserable woman, who had greeted him so unwelcomely at his first arrival in England, and who had erroneously claimed him as her son. Being himself now melancholy, the sight of a dejected and heart-broken creature was not so unwelcome to him. And, as since he had taken Nicholson's report of the poor woman's state

of mind, he had from his own senses had testimony of the man's lack of integrity, he was disposed to listen with more attention to what the woman might have to say.

"Oh, Sir," she exclaimed, "will you hear me, will you hear me? I am not mad—I wish I were that I might not feel the weight of sorrow that presses upon my heart." As she spoke, she stood in an attitude of supplication, almost kneeling, her hands clasped together, and her pale cheeks covered with tears.

"Sit down, good woman," said Atherton, "sit down, I will hear you, and patiently too."

"You do not know me perhaps," said she, "but I once by mistake addressed you.—"

"I recollect it perfectly well," said Atherton.

"But you are so altered I should not have known you again, but from your likeness to my murdered child—"

Seething and slight hysteric shrieks interrupted her; and Atherton, in whose ear the word "murder" had been ringing almost to madness, loudly and passionately echoed her, saying "Murdered child!"

"Ay," replied she with a suddenly assumed and almost miraculous calmness—"and murdered by his own father."

Atherton now saw the truth at once. From the confession which Nicholson had made to him, and from various other circumstances, it was now clear, that this woman was the wife of Major Martin, and mother of the young man whom Nicholson and the Major had murdered. And when she narrated to him those particulars of her history which she had previously given to Nicholson, all the mystery was solved, and it was clear to Atherton how and why he had been deprived of his birth-right. But it did not appear to him now how

his claim was to be established, or by what evidence he could prove himself to be the son of Sir Edward Vernon, and even for that chance, had there been a chance, he did not care to run the risk of being tried for murder.

“You speak positively,” said he to Mrs. Martin, “of your husband being concerned in this dreadful business; but what proof have you of it. It does not appear by the papers that he is suspected or accused of it. On the contrary it seems that I am the person considered as Nicholson’s accomplice.”

“Yes, Sir, I know that such reports have been circulated; but I know, that they have their origin with this wicked man. I know it as well as if he had told me himself and better too, for he never told me a word of truth in his life. You were the person whom he would have murdered. He has by some means or other gained an influence over the mind of

Nicholson and he can move him like a puppet. The deliberate and heartless wickedness of Major Martin is beyond all imagination or description. It was in consequence of that report that I endeavoured to find you out; because I knew that you were in London at the very time that the murder was committed."

"You knew it?" said Atherton. "How so?"

"I saw you, Sir, with my own eyes, and another person saw you at the same time, we could not both of us be mistaken. I would have spoken to you, but I did not dare to take such a liberty, for I knew what Mr. Nicholson had said, and I supposed that you would have taken it for granted that I was out of my mind, and knew not what I was talking about."

"But where did you see me?" asked Atherton.

"I saw you at the door of this house; and

the man that kept the house was speaking to you."

There was some consolation in this intelligence, for it was enough to convince him that there was proof of an *alibi* if needed. But there was yet another point and for that there seemed not any remedy in the testimony which Mrs. Martin could give, and that was, the proof, that Atherton was really the son of Sir Edward Vernon.

"It is impossible for me Sir to afford any proof of that, though I have no doubt of it, nor can you yourself after all that has taken place." Atherton did not from any thing that transpired at this interview feel shaken in his resolution of quitting the kingdom. His abhorrence of the cool brutality of Major Martin was now more powerfully excited than ever, after hearing the story of this poor woman.

"I wish," said he to her, "that it were at all

in my power to contribute to alleviate your sorrows. I see no relief for you but in the grave. You are and always must be haunted with dreadful recollections."

"If," said Mrs. Martin, "I could but have seen the remains of my poor child before they are consigned to the grave—"

"See the body of your murdered son!" exclaimed Atherton, who could not imagine how there could be any affection to raise such a wish, or, if there were remaining in her bosom any maternal affection, how there could be sufficient calmness to bear the sight. But Atherton who, though he had experienced some vicissitudes and had undergone some troubles, did not know, and could not enter into, the feelings of a mind which had for more than half its mortal existence been steeped in misery and disciplined in deep distress. There are

many trials to which human nature in its earlier days are subject which being deeply felt are passionately expressed, but the afflictions of early life which from the nature and constitution of our being have hope in the distance however undefined, differ widely in their influence on the soul from those more tedious, lengthened and hopeless trials, which, cleaving to the life through the mass of its being, leave no room for hope but in the colourless coldness of the grave. The tears of childhood are passionate and bright, the sorrows of early youth afford lessons of wisdom, and are as clouds of the morning to give grace and beauty to the bursting glories of a beautiful day, but when grief, reflection, experience and hopeless disappointment lie with their full weight on the bending frame of premature age, they produce effects and excite feelings, of which young

joy or young sorrow can form no conception.

Atherton pitied the agony of spirit which produced and excited such a wish. "You shall be gratified in your wish so far as I can contribute to it. I believe I have it in my power to accommodate you with the means of a journey into Yorkshire, if it be not too late for the object you have in view."

"By the time that I can arrive there," said she, it will not be more than ten days from his death."

Atherton wondering at the singularity and strangeness of the poor woman's wish furnished her with money to take her to Yorkshire, and himself, making the hastiest and scantiest preparations embarked for Madras. And now he was in the painful solitude of his thoughts bidding adieu to all his old friends and to all his English interests and was directing the

current of his thoughts and anticipations into an entirely new channel.

But soon was he destined to experience an illustration of the truth that very few of the movements of a man's life are in his own power. He had indeed already seen abundance of changes, and had been much the sport of circumstances, and like all other persons in such condition, he was frequently in hopes that his toils and troubles would soon come to an end, and that though the current of his life had hitherto been disturbed by storms and agitated by waves, the remainder would be calm, smooth and prosperous. He was however in this hope disappointed; for he had not been long on board when he was greeted by the sailor stranger whom he had seen at the public house in the Minories. "Oho my hearty; what, do you think we are to have the pleasure of your company to Madras?—No, no; you

will be too heavy a commodity for us, so we had better get rid of you now than heave you overboard in the channel."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Atherton.

"What do I mean?—Mr. Alias with the aquiline nose!—Why I mean that there are some gentlemen on deck who would be very glad to have a little conversation with you about the pretty story that I read you in the newspaper when I did you the honour to drink a little punch at your expence. Come my lad turn out. I knew you as soon as I set eyes upon you."

There was no room for resistance, or expostulation, or denial; he was recognized or at least supposed to be recognized as the individual described in the advertisement. He suffered himself therefore to be led on deck, where, with several persons whom he had

never seen before, he to his great astonishment beheld Nicholson's busy and consequential clerk, who immediately exclaimed, "That's the gentleman."

CHAPTER VIII.

It will be now necessary to go back to that part of the narrative where Nicholson, as has been mentioned, fled from the fury of his enraged accomplice. The terror stricken lawyer ran as fast and as far as his legs could carry him, not knowing whither he went, for he was a total stranger to the country. Towards day break he found himself near a town. He sat down by a stone wall with which the fields were fenced; and endeavoured to rally his thoughts;—but he had no power of consecutive thinking, and his very fox-like cunning had

forsaken him. For awhile he felt, as he afterwards acknowledged, as though he had absolutely and by his own hand murdered his friend Atherton; and notwithstanding every effort that he made he found himself totally incompetent to recall distinctly the events of the past night.

The appearance of a person, dressed as Nicholson was, sitting by the road side, naturally excited the curiosity of labouring people passing to their morning's work. Their attention and their remarks presently roused him from his reverie, and though they thought that he was only labouring under the effects of a boisterous and late intemperance, he imagined that they saw guilt and remorse in his care worn features. And so much was he off his guard that he was indiscreet enough to avow that he did not know where he was, by asking the name of the town which lay before him, or

rather below him for he was on an eminence from which he could look down upon the town.

"Why Halifax to be sure," was the answer, "and yon's where they used to behead the criminals," said his informant pointing to a spot not many paces from the place where they were standing and where in former days an apparatus of decapitation not much unlike a guillotine had stood, the terror of rogues.

"The poor gentleman is hardly sober yet," said the men to one another. And true enough Nicholson staggered and tottered like a drunken man, and gazed with an undirected eye when mention was made of the place of executing criminals.

His faintness at length reminding him that he needed rest and food, he descended the hill into the town and entered one of the humblest public houses he could see. And when his

recollection returned, as it did gradually and but imperfectly, he bethought himself that the rumour of the murder might reach Halifax before he should have left it. But miserable was his mortification when he found that no public conveyance or other wheeled convenience could be had to carry him towards the metropolis where alone he thought it possible that he might be able to hide his guilty head.

Now came upon him stronger than ever the sickness of fear and the nervous agitations of an unquiet spirit. He sat hour after hour purposeless and trembling, brooding over the inextricable helplessness of his condition; and the day wore away apace. The landlord of the public house, for his own sake as well as for that of his guest reminded Nicholson, that he might have dinner when he pleased. The word choked the criminal. The disorder of his spirit was manifest and the landlord feared he was

trazed. Finding that there was no conveyance to be had, but at a most inconvenient expence and a most annoying publicity he meditated at dusk to depart on foot from Halifax and find his way as well as he might towards Manchester, where in a large and busy town he might be better concealed, and from whence he might be conveyed to London. Having some purpose was a momentary relief to him, though but momentary : for towards evening the rumour of the Wakefield murder had reached Halifax ; for the pedlar, as above narrated had made the discovery of the murder soon after its commission.

When the landlord came into the room, where Nicholson was sitting and informed him of the dreadful discovery which had been made of the body of a murdered man in the Shephérds glen near Wakefield the intelligence overse him entirely. He betrayed in an instant most

unequivocal symptoms of guilt, insomuch that the man of the house thought himself but justified in taking active notice of it, and when a constable or two came into the room in all the arrogance of office, it is said that the sight was absolutely distressing; for the agonies of fear seized hold of the culprit and he threw himself on his knees, crying like a child, and exclaiming—"Oh spare me, spare me!—Indeed I did not do it.—Oh let me confess, let me confess—I will tell all—I will—Oh spare me." And he was in the hands of the officers passive and helpless as a new born infant.

By the rumour, which was presently spread through the town and by the audible cries and passionate exclamations of Nicholson a crowd was presently collected about the door, through which with some difficulty the officers forced their way leading their prisoner amidst the

shouts and execrations of the mob to the house of the nearest magistrate.

Before the magistrate a similar scene took place, and so much confusion was there in the haste and terror of Nicholson's ready confession that it was almost impossible to take any depositions. The magistrate was of opinion that the poor man was out of his mind. But when a little order was restored and a few questions were asked and distinctly answered, it appeared manifest, that Nicholson really did know something of the matter and that he might be if not guilty the means of detecting the guilty one and he was accordingly remanded for farther examination.

Major Martin as soon as he found himself deserted by Nicholson, and left alone to bury the body of his murdered boy, felt a tremor such as he had never felt before, and was almost offended with himself, that the firmness and

heartlessness of which he had been so proud were now deserting him. He managed however, though but imperfectly, as the result shewed, to cover the body of his, victim with the loose sand. He neglected also to remove the letter, which the young man had held in his dying hand. So that he left manifest proofs that his presence of mind had forsaken him.

Where he had concealed himself during the interval is not known, but shortly after Nicholson had surrendered himself, he received a message that a legal friend had voluntarily come forward to assist him. Nicholson who was nearly frightened to death was passive to all that was proposed, and made no hesitation at receiving the visits of his unknown legal adviser. The gentleman thus announced seemed shy of speaking in the presence of a third person, and not till the person who had introduced him was probably out of hearing did he

cautiously discover himself to the astonished lawyer.

Then came another fit of coward fear upon the pusillanimous accomplice, and he would have shrieked with terror as at the sight of a phantom, had not the Major exerted himself to command the terrified man into silence and calm endurance.

“And so,” said the Major, “you think to save your life by turning king’s evidence? And is your oral testimony to convict me, when your written testimony goes to prove an *alibi*?”

“Ah!” said Nicholson, “what the letter! — Did you leave the letter?”

“I did,” replied the Major, by accident; but ’tis well for me that I did so. Now ’tis you that are in my power, not I in your’s. You have knowledge enough of the world Mr. Nicholson, to know that when a murder has been

committed the public will have a victim ; and you know enough of evidence to be convinced, that the testimony of an accomplice has more force when there is corroborative evidence, than when the testimony stands alone upon its own merit.—Now have you a mind to save your own neck ?”

“ Oh Major Martin, you know that I am not guilty—”

Nicholson was proceeding to speak loudly and impassionately, but the Major stopped his mouth with his hand and said, “ Fool, be still—listen to me.”

Nicholson trembled and looked all submission. The Major proceeded—“ I have been admitted to you as your legal adviser, an acquaintance of yours I pass for, and my name is known as Thompson. There is no evidence against us except the letter which is something against you, and your silly exploit of rambling

about the country like a mad dog. Nobody knows of your acquaintance with me, but your intimacy with Frank is well known. And as we could not get rid of him by our hands we must try what the law will do for us."

"No, no Major Martin—you cannot propose to me such a scandalous device—I would rather die a thousand times."

"Die a thousand times!—You would be afraid to die once.—I tell you in a word if you do not consent this instant to implicate Frank in the murder, you are a dead man. Think for a moment—Will you have your skeleton in an iron frame swinging to the winds in Shepherd's Glen?"

"But how can I accuse him, how can I bring the charge against him? May not he prove an *alibi*? And then if I fail—"

"Come, come no more:—give me your confession. My scheme of getting possession of

the Vernon property is gone by ; now I must make the best of things as they are. The letter may be the means of bringing Sir Edward Vernon to the knowledge of the cheat I have put upon him ; but there is no proof—that all remains with me, and shall to the last.

Nicholson, at length, by the multiplied influence of his fears for himself and his dread of Major Martin, together with the consideration that Frank, by his recent concealment, might not be very well able to prove an *alibi*, was brought to consent to this last and lowest degradation of himself in his own eyes. And in consequence of this consent the advertisement appeared, on which Frank was taken up, and by which he was ultimately brought down into Yorkshire for further examination by the local magistrates.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Atherton found himself in the custody of officers of justice on the revolting charge of murder, though he could not think it possible, that any thing serious could result from it, yet the impression on his mind was painful and distressing. He was at all events under the necessity of pleading guilty to an intimacy with Nicholson, a man, whose character had never stood very high, and who had latterly from various causes, of which Atherton was not distinctly aware, sunk lower in the estimation of all reputable people.

The magistrate, before whom Atherton was brought to hear the deposition made by Nicholson, was named Wentworth, a gentleman of the highest respectability not only from the extent of his property but on account of the urbanity of his manners, the soundness of his understanding and the beneficent usefulness of his active life. While Frank was on his visit at Vernon Park he had frequently enjoyed the pleasure of Mr. Wentworth's company, and they had conversed on many topics, and Mr. Wentworth had expressed himself much pleased with the good sense, and good feeling which were so decidedly manifest in all that the young man said. Nor was there any individual, save Sir Edward Vernon himself, who had so much contributed, as Mr. Wentworth had, to give Frank a confidence in, and a respect for himself. It was a painful meeting to both the magistrate and the accused, that recollecting

that their last interview was at Sir Edward Vernon's table and that their last conversation was an animated political discussion on terms of intellectual and civil equality, but that now a great and impassable gulph seemed fixed between them. And when Frank was announced as "the prisoner," a thrill of horror pervaded his whole frame, and in spite of himself, of his innocence, of his constitutional and his collected fortitude he felt humbled. He could not readily bring himself to let his eyes meet those of Mr. Wentworth; but the merciful voice of the considerate magistrate, who seemed to cherish in his heart the maxim of the law, which considers every man innocent till he is proved guilty, recalled the confidence of the accused, and Frank with quivering lips and tearful eyes made his obeisance.

In a low and a slightly interrogative tone the magistrate said "Your name—"

"My name?" replied Frank, gathering courage as hespoke, it has been my misfortune, Sir, to bear many names. In my earlier days I bore the name of Atherton and was taught to consider it not my own. An act of violence and treachery then forced upon me the name of Watkins. Self defence induced me to assume the name of Jackson, and at last a system of almost indescribable villainy, which has its climax in this accusation, gave me the name of Martin."

"But by what name am I now to address you?"

"By the name of Atherton, sir, if you please."

"I take it for granted, that you are aware of the charge that has been made against you."

"Perfectly. And I am astonished beyond measure at the infatuation of the poor deluded man who has made the charge. I hope that

you will not on such testimony for a moment suspect me to be guilty of such a crime."

"A jury of your countrymen will acquit you of the charge, even should I be compelled in the painful discharge of my duty to commit you."

"A jury, Sir," replied Atherton with great feeling, "may acquit me of the charge, but when will my memory acquit me of the humiliation of the trial?"

"I must be guided altogether by what appears," replied Mr. Wentworth, "and not by my feelings or my wishes. I am concerned that you should, if innocent, have ever been placed in circumstances, that should lead to such a charge as this."

Atherton shook his head and replied, "Even that, Sir, was rather my misfortune than my fault. If I have done wrong it has been by means of a credulous mind, rather than of a

perverse will. I have not had it in my power to choose my society."

The above talk was in a low voice on either side, as if both magistrate and prisoner were anxious to keep from the public a very distinct report of what passed between them. After an interval of an embarrassing nature to both parties, Atherton said, "Is it in my power to demand, or in yours to grant, a private hearing?"

"It is in my power to grant it, if I think it may be conducive to the ends of justice."

"Then, Sir," answered the accused, "I can assure you, if you will take the assurance of a person in my situation, that it will be highly conducive to the ends of justice. In three minutes I could convince you that it will."

The magistrate seemed glad of the opportunity thus afforded him of entering into a private examination without compromising his

character for impartiality. And to the people in the room, who were his neighbours and dependents, he expressed it as his particular desire that nothing should be mentioned, that had passed in the short interview.

Mr. Wentworth then leading Atherton into another apartment gave express orders not to be interrupted. Locking the door he desired the accused to be seated; and then laying aside the air and aspect of the magistrate he said, "Unless I have been very much deceived indeed, I certainly am not addressing a criminal. But this variety of name is exceedingly perplexing. Perhaps you can explain it."

"If you can patiently listen to a long story," replied Atherton, "I can explain it to you very satisfactorily."

"It will be my duty to listen not only patiently, but attentively, to all that you may have to state, and the more it tends to your

exculpation, the more satisfactory will it be to me. But if you be really innocent of the charge, you may not conjecture in what manner it is brought against you."

Mr. Wentworth then read to him the deposition of Nicholson, which stated in substance, that Atherton, having had some suspicion of the injustice of Major Martin's claim, had frequently importuned Nicholson on the subject. That Nicholson, having had a disagreement with Major Martin, resolved to let Atherton into the secret. That for this purpose he, Nicholson, had written to Atherton, who had thereupon withdrawn himself from Vernon Park, and had concealed himself from Major Martin. But as this first communication had not been sufficiently explicit, Nicholson went down to Wakefield for the purpose of communicating more particularly with Atherton, who was concealed in that neighbourhood, and

that he sent him the letter which was found with the murdered man. That the deceased having knowledge, by some means or other, that Nicholson and Atherton were to meet at midnight in the shepherd's glen, came there also. That seeing him approach, Atherton, who had some previous pique against him, proposed that if he were troublesome they should despatch him. That the deceased, who was a powerful man, wrested the letter out of Atherton's hand, and that Atherton stabbed him, and afterwards buried him with Nicholson's assistance, and that Nicholson, hearing of the discovery of the murder, felt himself imperiously and irresistibly driven to confess the part which he had taken in the transaction.

"Fortunately," replied Atherton, "I can have testimony that I was in London at the time that this murder was committed. But there will be no occasion, I hope, to have re-

course to that evidence. The first letter which I received from Nicholson, or rather the only one, for the other alluded to I never saw, I will now shew you, and with it give you an explanation of it, and its occasion."

Atherton then shewed Mr. Wentworth the letter, which Nicholson had written concerning the pretended accusation of a highway robbery connected with the fifty pound note won from the Macclesfield grazier. And giving the worthy magistrate a narrative of his adventures from the period of his leaving Mr. Bryant, he concluded by saying, "And now, Sir, though I have not of course any evidence to shew that would convince a jury, yet I have not the slightest hesitation in saying to you, that I believe this Major Martin to be the murderer. He has mistaken his victim, and has murdered his own son.—Yes, you shudder and look incredulously at me—"

Atherton was proceeding, but was checked by a change in the magistrate's countenance indicative of a sudden thought occurring to his mind.

"What kind of a person is this Major Martin? Can you describe him to me?" asked Mr. Wentworth.

Atherton described him fully and particularly. Mr. Wentworth listened with the profoundest attention, with a breathless and agitated silence. When the description was finished, the worthy magistrate hastily rose up and said, "I think I see it.—One word more. Have you any knowledge of any legal friend of the prisoner Nicholson, who is likely to be assisting him in this emergency?"

"I have not."

"It occurs to me from what you have said of the reckless character of Major Martin, that it is not impossible that he may be the person

now acting as legal adviser to the prisoner Nicholson. If so there will be a solution of the whole difficulty. The keeper of the gaol has observed to me that there is something exceedingly suspicious and mysterious about the man.—At all events I must remand you for farther examination; and you shall be put in an apartment where you may see any one going into or coming out of the part of the prison, where Nicholson is confined; and if you see this Major Martin let me know, and steps shall immediately be taken to watch him closely.—My situation,” continued Mr. Wentworth after a little pause, “is one of great difficulty. I am acting now towards you on the strength of moral evidence, whereas my duty is to be guided only by legal evidence. I cannot refuse to receive these depositions, though I strongly suspect them to be false.”

Atherton was remanded accordingly, and

found in the unexpected comforts and accommodations of his place of confinement, the beneficial effects of a letter from the magistrate to the keeper of the gaol.

CHAPTER X.

NOTWITHSTANDING all the care which Mr. Wentworth took to keep from the public ear the brief public interview between himself and Atherton, and notwithstanding the then comparatively imperfect state of reporting and catering for the newspapers, all particulars, and more than all, found their way into the channels of public information. The whole county of York, and the whole kingdom of England, resounded from one end to the other with talk of the horrid and mysterious murder of the shepherd's glen. The poor pedlar who

had discovered the body made his fortune by the host of interrogators who became his customers for the sake of conversing with the man who had seen and handled the murdered body; and every one was eager to purchase some tin trinket or other for the sake of saying, that they purchased it of the man, who had discovered the dreadful murder of the shepherd's glen.—No parties met for festivity at each other's houses without talking of the murder, as it was emphatically called, and all the world seem to look as if they thought that they should never talk or think of anything else as long as they should live.—Newspapers were thought stark naught if they contained not some fresh information, some new discovery, some biographical anecdote, or some personal account of the murderer or the murdered, or of their respective families, kindred, connections or past pursuits. And as where there is

a demand, there will be a supply of some description or other, every editor was eager to catch at some scrap or other, and so long as it related to the topic of the murder, was not very particular as to its accuracy, knowing that, true or false, it would answer the purpose, and be sure to be read and talked about. Furthermore, all tramps, and venders of songs and dying speeches were daily supplied, and did daily supply the public, with full, true and particular accounts of the dreadful murder. Thus the public knew the whole truth, but knowing so much more than the truth, nobody knew what the truth was, for it was not in the power of any discriminator of narrative or sifter of evidence to separate truth from falsehood.

The metropolis had, of course, its share of the rumours, and its printers, of course, contributed to their typographical circulation:

Concealment therefore from any individual not absolutely deaf and blind, or immured in unapproachable solitary confinement, was altogether impossible. But as the truth came, surrounded with many falsehoods, these falsehoods increased the effect to those who knew nothing of the parties, and greatly diminished it to those who were acquainted with them. Thus clustered and overwhelmed with manifested obvious inaccuracies, the story found its way to Charlotte Vernon, in spite of all the care which her father had taken to keep it from her.

It had been necessary to let the young lady know of the death of him who had passed for her cousin, and the son of Sir Edward Vernon; and as is usual in all cases of violent death the first information was that he had died suddenly. Mr. Vernon knew that there had been, on the part of Sir Edward Vernon,

a desire that his supposed son should marry Charlotte, and the young lady's father also knew that there had been, on the part of the deceased, some approaches of attention symptomatic of a commencing or purposed attachment; but he felt that on the part of Charlotte there must have been more than the surmounting of indifference to receive these attentions gratefully. The decease, merely as to its fact, was therefore communicated to her, not with any apprehension that it would painfully, passionately or deeply affect her feelings, and all her emotion was, that she could not have loved him. But Mr. Vernon did not know that there existed any attachment between his daughter and Atherton. And indeed there was blended with the love they had for each other, so great an admixture of admiration and esteem, that it nearly concealed from themselves the tenderer sentiment which was

the soul of the admiration, and the basis of the esteem. They had not been mad enough to form an absolute engagement, nor were they weak enough to sink down into the childishness of passionate despair, because it was clear to them, that under all circumstances such an engagement could not be formed, with any reasonable prospect of a prosperous fulfilment.

When however these rumours which implicated Atherton in the charge of the murder, and when the actual advertisement which offered a large reward for his apprehension, and when a paragraph stating, that he was absolutely taken in attempting to make his escape out of the country,—when all these things came to the knowledge of Charlotte, then the fortitude of her spirit, and the calmness of her passion for Atherton were put to the trial, and a bitter trial it was.

Her father who considered that the papers

would naturally be filled up with all manner of idle reports, and painful details wisely kept them from her sight ; but it was not in his power to seal the lips of all who might approach her. The young lady's own maid had however received some caution not to be too hastily communicative, and probably intended to obey the injunction ; but as it was the privilege of this attendant to discourse with her mistress on the gossip of the newspapers, and as there was no gossip in the papers that any one could think it worth while to talk about except the Yorkshire murder, the young woman's tongue was constrainedly, and awkwardly silent. The absence of the usual volubility was noticed one morning by Miss Vernon, and as there was a look of extraordinary seriousness, and almost sadness about the attendant, Charlotte supposed that peculiar calamity had befallen the young woman,

and she questioned her to that effect;—the question was answered by a sigh, and a gentle movement of the head, asking as it appeared for farther interrogation.

When urged to be more explicit, she burst into tears and exclaimed, "Oh, pray don't ask me, pray don't."

"Child," replied her mistress, "I must insist upon knowing what it is that ails you."

"You must not say it was I that told you, but the fact is that — but I hope it is not true — but everybody says it is — that that nice young gentleman, who was here, that Sir Edward was so partial to and who went down with you into Yorkshire, is taken up for the murder —"

"'Tis impossible!" exclaimed Charlotte, and she was about to say more, but suddenly there came into her mind a recollection of her father's recent reservedness of manner, and

there was a suspicion that there was something wrong. But not willing to expose her emotion to her servant, she desired to see her father immediately.—Thought is proverbially quick, and as in a few minutes of an imperfect sleep the dream of days and weeks may take place, so in a few seconds of anxiety, on topics of great personal interest, a host of conjectures and theories may bring together the scattered limbs of their several and detached evidences framing a picture of coherent probability. So was it now in the mind of Charlotte Vernon; for in the interval between the departure of her maid and the arrival of her father, her mind rapidly meditating on what she had heard, and hastily filling up the interstices of information by the web of an active imagination, the whole mystery seemed to be developed in the fact, that the death of her supposed cousin was by violence, and the violence was the result of a

quarrel, and the murder for which Atherton was taken up was the murder of a duel.—This was painful enough—even the suspicion of it.

Now Mr. Vernon, who had been left a widower, when his daughter was but twelve years old, had lived with his child on terms of the clearest confidence and most open hearted sincerity, not exercising, nor indeed having occasion to exercise, any authoritative restraint, nor ever converting the affectionateness of guiding, into the harshness and impatience of rough compulsion. Therefore his daughter could always address him without fear or suspicion. And when he came into her apartment she took him by the hand, and throwing an arm round his neck she kissed him, and while her eyes twinkled with coming tears, and the muscles of her lips were in convulsive action, she said, “Father, you have been kindly endeavouring to keep some painful

secret from me ;—an accident has imperfectly revealed it to me. You must let me know the whole truth, I can bear any truth better than this sad suspense.”

“ I have told you of your cousin’s sudden death.”

“ Yes, but not by whose hand he fell.”

“ Not by whose hand !” echoed Mr. Vernon rather with a view of gaining time than with any intention of deceiving.

“ Did he not die a violent, as well as a sudden death ?” asked Charlotte.

The father pressing his child’s hand tremblingly said, “ ’Tis too true, my dear child, ’tis too true he did.”

“ Then,” said Charlotte, who saw that her father seemed reluctant to proceed to farther particulars, “ I must pray that you will tell me more ; say by whose hand he fell. With whom was the quarrel, and for what ?”—Then

after a pause, and with great energy, she added—"Or for *whom*?—Tell me—I must know if it be death to know it; for darkness invents the most dreadful visions."

"It will be a painful task for you to hear, and for me to tell you;—besides everything at present is but uncertain rumour."

"But I feel myself too deeply interested, implicated perhaps, I should say, to bear suspense—Now tell me, my dear father, am I not implicated in the cause of the quarrel? Is it not that my name is printed in the papers, that you have kept them from my sight?"

Mr. Vernon now saw wherein the misapprehension of his daughter lay, and he also saw that he could not easily remove that misapprehension without revealing the whole story, so far as he himself knew it by means of the newspapers and his brother's letters; and finding that his daughter had nerved up

her spirit to bear the narrative with fortitude, whatever it might be, he besought her to sit down patiently, and to listen with such composure as she might to the melancholy narrative he had to tell her. Then he shewed her the letters which he had received from Vernon Park, and the several paragraphs in the papers, and at length the young lady was put into possession of all that was then known of the matter.

“And now, my dear child, what can we say to all this?” asked Mr. Vernon. “We certainly, all of us, had the highest opinion of this young man; but from what I have seen and heard, there is certainly something strangely suspicious.—But if he be unjustly accused, I hope and trust he will be able to make his innocence appear at his trial.”

“Trial!” exclaimed Charlotte with a passionate loudness that almost amounted to a

scream, "God in his mercy forbid that it should ever come to that.—But even if it did," continued she in a more subdued tone, "it would be in my power to save him, if they would receive the oath of a passionate and heart-broken girl, for I myself saw him in London within six hours of the time that the murder was said to be committed in Yorkshire."

"And did you speak to him?"

"No, nor he to me."

"Then you might have been mistaken."

"No, my senses might deceive me, but my heart could not, and that was ready to burst when I saw that he endeavoured to avoid me, and I proudly let him succeed."

"You speak, my dear, as though you loved him."

After a moment's beautiful and passionate silence, she glided from the chair on which

she was sitting, and bending at her father's knees in the attitude of a child that is learning its prayers from a parent's lips, she said, in a tone of solemn and most musical emphasis, "Father, I *do* love him!"

Her father was moved even unto tears, and he lifted her from the ground and pressed her to his bosom and wept audibly. And he looked at her earnestly and interrogatively, but not reproachfully, for he loved his daughter with such a confiding love, that he could not conceive it possible that she could place her affections wrongfully. His daughter's love for Atherton made Mr. Vernon almost sure that he must be innocent. Her father recovering his briefly suspended power of speech, merely echoed his daughter's words—"Love him?"

"Yes, Sir, and love myself the better for loving him. I loved him at Madeira for the persecution he had suffered, and the equa-

nimity with which he bore it; I loved him for his generous and ingenuous kindness to poor Edmund, that he watched every indication of his changing wishes, and that he conversed with him so intelligibly as to reconcile him to his sufferings;—Edmund recollected him to the last, and said but a few hours before his death, “ I miss my kind companion.”—I loved him for the unfawning gratitude that he shewed for the kindness he experienced from my uncle—I loved him when I thought that he had perished—I must love him as long as I live. I never can believe ill of him, for when I do I die.”

A long silence followed this passionate declaration; and father and daughter separated for the rest of the morning; and at dinner they met again, and there was added to their party their ever acceptable friend Dr. Johnson.

The topic of their conversation was the me-

lancholy event which had brought the name of Vernon so painfully before the public eye. Mr. Vernon informed Dr. Johnson that the whole truth, as far as it was known to any one, was known to Miss Vernon.

"You have done right," said the doctor, "in not concealing the matter any longer. There is always a consolation to the mind in the very thought of knowing the worst. As our happiness grows dull, when there is nothing more to hope, so does our misery become tolerable, when there is nothing more to fear."

"But what a painful thing it is, doctor," said Mr. Vernon, "that the young man you recommended to me, and of whom we both thought so highly, should be implicated in this affair, and even charged as the actual murderer."

"Why, Sir, it is a serious charge, but if he

be guiltless, he can, no doubt, prove his absence from the scene, and then the charge recoils on the head of him who made it."

"He has certainly kept himself very secluded of late," said Mr. Vernon, "he left us very abruptly at Vernon Park, and if he has been in London since, he has kept himself quite secluded. My daughter imagines that she has seen him in town."

"I more than imagine, I know it," replied the young lady.

"And now you mention this," said Dr. Johnson, "I have a confused recollection that I also have seen him."

"But I know distinctly that I saw him," said Miss Vernon, "and if this conspiracy should be carried so far as to send him to trial, I myself will go and give my voluntary and not unsupported testimony to prove the impossibility of his guilt."

“Such voluntary testimony on the part of a young lady might create a sensation among the spectators, but would it make an impression on a jury?” said Dr. Johnson. “If he actually was in town at the time that this murder is said to have been committed in Yorkshire, there must be some individual, and in all probability many, whom he can call as witnesses to prove the fact. If you saw him in London, you may be sure that others saw him too; and then your testimony will be superfluous. If however you fancied you saw him, when you saw him not, you may give evidence that you saw him in London, while another may give evidence of having seen him in Leicester; then your testimony will be injurious to him.”

“But is it not my duty to give what assistance is in my power towards repelling an unjust accusation?”

“It is your duty, young lady,” replied the

doctor, "to contribute to the cause of justice undoubtedly, but it is also as undoubtedly your duty to obey the dictates of judgment. I honor your zeal in the cause of the unjustly accused, and I honour it so much, that I would do all in my power to regulate and restrain your zeal from injuring whom it would serve. Mr. Vernon," continued the doctor addressing himself to the young lady's father, "I have been considering the proposal you made to me, and I am ready to accompany you and the young lady to Vernon Park."

The doctor shortly after this announcement took his leave to prepare for his journey; and Charlotte, who found that her father had arranged this meeting to facilitate the purposes of justice, thanked him passionately, affectionately and frequently.

CHAPTER XI.

WHILE these things were passing in London, the investigation was proceeding in Yorkshire with all diligence and sagacity on the part of those interested either in fact or by sympathy. Major Martin continued his professional visits to Nicholson, and assisted him with his malignant counsel; and Nicholson, who had in a measure recovered from his first paralyzing fright, took the lessons of his almost infernal preceptor with tolerable readiness and docility. But now it becomes evident, that the insatiation by which wickedness

digs the pit into which it falls, had taken possession of the mind of the unprincipled and heartless Major. For with a careless boldness, at which Nicholson himself was astonished, the Major talked to him of the murder, and of their scheme to make Atherton their victim, and he continued his visits day after day, and even several times in the course of a day, when he might, as the lawyer imagined, now take advantage of the apprehension of Atherton, and make his escape. Nicholson ventured to advert to this probable step.

“No,” replied the Major, “let me first see that I am safe by the conviction and execution of Atherton. When I see him pendent from the gallows, I shall be in no apprehension. The public will have had a victim, and will seek no farther. But if I were silly enough to run away now, I should but invite the dogs to run after me.”

“ Your reason is good,” replied Nicholson, “ but there is still a doubt whether there will be sufficient evidence to convict him. He is not yet committed, and the last time I was examined I had a question put to me which I could not answer, and I was forced to evade it as well as I could ; and I am afraid that I excited a suspicion that I was not the accomplice, but the principal.”

“ How now, simpleton ?” exclaimed the Major, “ What examination ? And what question ? Why not let me know, as your legal adviser ?—You are foolishly attempting to play your own game, and you have neither skill nor steadiness enough for it.”

“ It was not a regular and set examination,” replied the lawyer, “ it was a question too, on which I could not consult a professional adviser—and indeed it was well that you were

not present—it might have produced some confusion and suspicion.”

“Speak, speak, be definite,” cried Major Martin.

Nicholson affected emotion, and probably felt it. The Major who had of late been exceedingly irritable, scowled on him a look of contempt and said, “Let us have no pantomime, but tell me plainly what you are driving at.”

“The dagger;” replied Nicholson trembling as he uttered the word.

“Well,” said the Major, “and what of that?”

“Mr. Wentworth came to me here, and asked me if I recollected what became of the dagger after the murder was committed. I could not tell him, and I felt confused, because I thought that some use might be made of the

disposal of that, either for or against us.—Did you conceal it?”

“Conceal it!” replied the Major, “to be sure I did, and most effectually too. See here!” Then he opened his waistcoat, and produced the stained weapon, which he had kept carefully wrapped up in a handkerchief. “Not a drop of the blood,” continued he, “has touched ought else save this handkerchief.”

“Do you not act imprudently,” said Nicholson, “in carrying this about with you?”

“No,” replied the other, “my name is upon it. And I keep it in my possession; for it is safer in my custody than if it were buried in the sand or drowned in the water. It is now where no one would think of looking for it, and where no one is likely to light upon it by accident.”

"Could you not even now contrive to use it as means of evidence against him?"

"I could," said the Major doubtfully.

There was a pause of some minutes; and then the Major continued; "We must contrive means to connect it with him.—Surely it may be done.—How was the question put to you? Tell me, if you can, the very words of your answer."

"Mr. Wentworth asked me if I knew—"

"Psha,—repeat his actual words," said the Major impatiently.

Nicholson attempted it. "As far as I can recollect, he said, 'Do you know what he did with the dagger after he had committed the murder?'—I did not answer him immediately, for I acknowledge that I trembled at the mention of it."

"Good," said the Major, "you played pantomime; or in other words you looked like

a fool. But if your memory can bear you out to repeat the words you used, I should be glad to hear them."

"I hesitated for some time," replied the lawyer.

"Hesitated!" echoed the Major, "you can never speak without hesitation. And even now you look as if you were meditating a lie."

"Indeed," said Nicholson, "I am not, But when the question was put to me a thought occurred to me—"

"Ay! a thought occurred to you!—I tell you what, Mr. Nicholson, you are one of those awkward and useless creatures that have not modesty enough to submit to be used as instruments, nor wit enough to act to any good purpose as agents. You thought forsooth! And pray what was your thought?"

"I thought," replied the humiliated man, "that if you knew where the dagger was, you

might use your knowledge as the means of convicting Atherton : therefore I did not give a direct answer, but looked and spoke as if I was confused and terrified at the recollection. So that I cannot repeat the very words that I used."

While Nicholson was speaking, the countenance of Major Martin underwent many changes, but in them all was the expression of fury and contempt. The stained dagger was in his hand, and he clenched it firmly and looked at it fiercely. Then with his left hand he violently grasped Nicholson by the shoulder, and shaking him down from his seat to a kneeling posture on the ground, to which transition of attitude the lawyer's fears assisted him, the Major, with an indiscreet loudness of tone, exclaimed, " Villain, I know you are deceiving me. I had better make short work

of it at once : and if I am destined to the gallows I may as well do something worth being hanged for."

Nicholson at the sight of the dagger presented to his breast, more with the threatening of contempt than with any murderous intention, screamed aloud, and before the Major could silence him, a crash was heard, the door was burst violently open, and the Major was a prisoner. He felt his arms pinioned by the iron grasp of men mightier than himself. He held the dagger still firmly, and when the momentary shock was over, he endeavoured to turn his look round upon them that held him, and in that look was revenge, as though he was ready to use the stained weapon in his defence ; but when by a hasty movement he had contrived to gain sight of one of those that held him, he was struck with a sudden nerveless-

ness, and dropping the polluted instrument on the ground, he quietly said, "Then it is all over."

Nicholson rose in a stupor of astonishment, and looking enquiringly on the men in whose grasp the Major's strength was weakness, and before whose eye the Major's haughtiness quailed to the dust, the lawyer thought that he had seen one of them before, and by a little effort of recollection he called to mind that the man had made his appearance as waiter at the public house where they had supped the night previous to the murder. He imagined also that he had seen both of them elsewhere, but could not distinctly call to mind, when and where.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. VERNON's party consisting of Doctor Johnson, Miss Vernon and her father arrived after a rapid and eventless journey at Vernon Park ; and they found that though joy is often a pleasant and powerful ingredient in a welcome, yet sorrow sometimes prompts as great a cordiality of reception.

“ This is kind of you brother to come and see a broken hearted man. And my good Dr. Johnson, to what fortunate accident am I indebted for the pleasure and honour of a visit from you ? ”

"To the accident of intention," replied the doctor, "I love my friends best, when they best love me, and they best love me when I am ready to sympathize with their sorrows, or to assist them in their perplexities."

"Alas, Sir," replied the worthy baronet, "sympathy is all the consolation I can now receive. I am suffering now for the sins of my youth, or to call them by the mildest name, my follies."

"Call them by the harsher name," replied the doctor, "repentance will then go deeper, and perform its healing office most effectually. But I come not as your confessor, or as the director of your penance. I would willingly assist you in ought that is good."

"Would that I knew," replied Sir Edward Vernon, "what assistance to ask. Time, perhaps, may develop the painful mystery that surrounds me, or, for ought I can see to the

contrary, I may have to mourn the death of two young men, and not know whether the murdered, or the murderer, was my own child."

"But we are come, Sir," said the doctor, "to bring a probable testimony that the young man, now accused, is accused falsely. The life that is gone we cannot recall, that which is threatened, perhaps we may save. This young lady has an impression, which if corroborated or not contradicted by positive testimony or strong opposing probabilities, may go far towards rescuing the accused."

"It is more than an impression, my dear uncle," said Charlotte Vernon, "I am as clear that I saw Mr. Martin in London, at the very time that this dreadful event is said to have taken place, as I am that I see you now. Besides, Sir, can you for a moment imagine that the person whom you used to converse with so

agreeably, and with such satisfaction, whom you used to praise so heartily as uniting gentleness of manner, and strength of character, should be guilty of so heinous an offence? You would hardly believe him to be guilty of the slightest offence, and can you give credit to those who charge him with the greatest crime that man can commit? And consider, Sir, who it is that accuses him."

Mr. Vernon gently checked the impetuosity of his daughter, but Sir Edward kissed her, and thanked her, and said, "My dear niece, you speak my sentiments. But I am at present all in the dark. A mystery surrounds me, and I am expecting I know not what."

"Sir," replied Dr. Johnson, "it is the common lot of humanity to be always in the dark as to futurity. Dangers and developments are ever near us; storms are awaiting us, often when they are not visibly threatening

us. You are expecting some development, you are by that very expectation prepared for the worst that can befall you."

In the course of the afternoon of the day on which Mr. Vernon and his fellow travellers arrived at Vernon Park, Mr. Wentworth made his welcome appearance to the party. They all knew and respected him, and they regarded him with so much esteem, that from his lips they could more calmly receive even unfavourable intelligence. But he did not come to bring any fresh intelligence of a painful nature, he rather was the bearer of good news: for it certainly was considered in the light of good news, by all that party, that Mr. Wentworth was able to say, that he had reason to suppose, that the accusation brought by Nicholson against the younger prisoner, was a false accusation.

"And I have ground," added he, "to hope

that very shortly we shall be able to detect the real criminal. Such steps have been taken, and such information has been received, that I think it next to impossible that he should escape; and if things be as I have reason to expect, a character of such consummate wickedness will be exhibited to the world as it has seldom seen, and can scarcely credit."

It need hardly be said that Sir Edward Vernon, by means of all the examinations and reports which found their way into the newspapers, had his suspicions strongly excited that the young man who had been recently murdered was not his son. But while he had an apprehension that possibly Atherton might be his son, he hardly dared to cherish the idea on account of the difficulty of proof, and the dreadful situation in which this accusation had now placed him. But now when Mr. Wentworth had spoken of the high probability of

Atherton's innocence, and of the hope of apprehending the real perpetrator of the murder, his spirits revived, and he began to cast about in his mind for means of detecting and establishing the truth. Having also a perfect confidence in the judgment and discretion of Mr. Wentworth, he knew that that gentleman would not speak unadvisedly on the subject, therefore he felt the more confident that Atherton was not the guilty person.

He then took Mr. Wentworth apart into another room, and said to him; "You may naturally suppose that this event has given me a very serious shock. And you are one of the very few that I can open my mind to.—It is painful to a man of my retired habits to have my name bandied about in the newspapers. I am every day seeing paragraphs concerning this murder, and I find that it has got abroad, in consequence of Nicholson's confession; that

this unfortunate young man who was killed is not my son. They even go so far as to say that the other, who is called Martin, is my child, and that he committed the murder at the instigation of this Nicholson who had conspired to deprive him of his birthright, and who, afterwards repenting of his treachery or quarrelling with his employer, attempted to repair the evil, but unfortunately paved the way for greater evil."

"But, my dear Sir Edward," replied Mr. Wentworth, "why do you not make a point of seeing the person to whom you entrusted your infant, and endeavour, by examination, to get at the truth? A great deal may be done by close interrogation."

When Mr. Wentworth said this, he was in possession of Atherton's history, and he knew that Major Martin was the person affecting to act as Nicholson's legal adviser.

“ The fact is that I have written to Major Martin, but I have had no answer ;” replied Sir Edward. “ I am therefore still more apprehensive that there may be some truth in the reports ; and that he is overwhelmed at the loss of his son, and that he is reluctant to acknowledge the imposition that he has practised upon me.”

“ What is the general character of this Major Martin ?” asked Mr. Wentworth. At which question Sir Edward Vernon shook his head, and sighed.—“ You must have known something of him, or you would never have entrusted your child to his care,” added the magistrate.

“ I then knew too little of him,” said the baronet, “ but I have since known too much. I was a young man. I had made a foolish marriage, and had hoped to conceal it from my ather, and did conceal it. And when my

poor wife died, after the birth of a child, and an advantageous match was proposed to me, I did not dare to acknowledge that I had a child living born in wedlock. I committed it therefore to the care of this man, who had married my wife's sister. And as he appeared to be a man of strong mind, I thought I could confide in him, nor was I so far disappointed. I paid him handsomely for what he undertook, and at his request I never saw the child. For, as he said, it was probable that I might have a family by my second wife, and I should do best to regard this first child as not being, unless, added he, any change should take place which might render it desirable for me to have a son and heir, and then I should know where to find one. Now when my poor Edmund seemed not likely to live, this Major Martin hinted to me, that the son whom I had not seen from his infancy was still alive, and that

I might probably break the affair to Lady Vernon, who, I must say took the information with great equanimity, and at the death of her son, consented to receive him whom I supposed and acknowledged to be mine. Greatly indeed was I disappointed in him, Mr. Wentworth, as you well know. His education had been sadly neglected, and his manners were such as would disgrace the humblest rank in life. His extravagance and his propensity to gaming almost threatened to be ruinous; but from the manner in which he drew upon me for money I suspected, and I think not without cause, that some one was assisting him in the expenditure, and that one, as I verily believe, was Major Martin. This man seems to have a strange power over every one that he has anything to do with. I must confess to you, I stood somewhat in awe of him, and I could never tell why."

“ Have you seen much of him lately ? ”
asked Mr. Wentworth.

“ Not much since he restored, or, more properly speaking perhaps, pretended to restore my son to me.”

“ Has Lady Vernon seen him ? ”

“ She has, and dislikes him exceedingly. There is always an abruptness in her style, as you may have observed, but towards Major Martin I cannot but say that her behaviour has absolutely partaken of downright rudeness.”

“ And do you know anything of this man’s wife ? ”

“ I merely know that they have been separated for many years. But for what cause I know not, and have never enquired. Indeed notwithstanding my acquaintance with him, and his assisting me in the disposal of my child, I have scarcely been intimate with him.

He has been sometimes in England, and sometimes abroad; and when he has been in England, he has had no settled residence. He has called himself Major; but whether he has any claim to the title I know not. He appears to me to have two sets of acquaintance, the one private, and the other public. What sort of a life he lives I know not; but I have heard strange stories of him, and my brother has received hints, from many persons in the city, that an acquaintance with him is not desirable or reputable."

From these, and many other remarks of the same nature, Mr. Wentworth saw that the suspicions which he had entertained of this man were not without some foundation in probability; and when he had heard the stories of Atherton, and Sir Edward Vernon, he was astonished that the latter, who was not generally deficient in discernment, should have

been so imposed on, as not to have entertained something more than a suspicion. For to Mr. Wentworth's mind it was as clear as light that this unprincipled man had been making a prey of Sir Edward Vernon.

Hastening therefore from this colloquy at Vernon Park, he went to the gaol where Nicholson was confined, and held that conversation with him which, as mentioned in the last chapter, Nicholson related to the Major, or, it should rather be said, which he affected and attempted to relate. There was also in that conversation, another enquiry made and answered, of which enquiry, and its answer, Nicholson had said nothing to his employer, and the apprehension of the consequences of which confused and embarrassed him. That question was with reference to the house from whence they started on their excursion to the shepherd's glen ; for there was a rumour about

the neighbourhood, that on the night of the murder two suspicious characters, strangers are always suspicious characters, were seen lurking about a house which was by no means in good repute. Mr. Wentworth had that pleasant as well as commanding manner, that he was able to extort more information from an examination than less dexterous magistrates could do. And he had extorted from Nicholson, though Nicholson himself could scarcely tell how, the information that he and his accomplice had started from the house in question.

To that house Mr. Wentworth betook himself, almost, as some persons would have thought, at the risk of his life; but he had the precaution to take with him a Bow Street officer, of no common sagacity and address, who had been sent down from town to assist in the detection of the perpetrators of the murder.

"We are all right here," said the officer, "I have had a glimpse of an old acquaintance. You had better remain here, Sir, in this open parlour, while I have a word or two with my friends."

Mr. Wentworth stayed as he was directed, and presently the officer, who seemed to have the faculty of a ferret, brought forward two individuals of such aspect and feature, as manifestly showed that they were accustomed but little to the decencies and decorums of life. The magistrate shuddered at their rough and ruthless aspect, and regarded them as beings capable of any violation of the peace of society. But in their roughness and rudeness there was a species of courtesy peculiar indeed to themselves, and shewing that the character of humanity was not entirely obliterated in them.

"This gentleman," said the officer to them, pointing to Mr. Wentworth, "is the magistrate

before whom Nicholson has been examined, and perhaps you can give the gentleman some information concerning the proceedings of Nicholson and his companion on the night of the murder."

The men looked significantly at each other, and the officer looked significantly at both.

"Why yes," said one of them, "we do know the gentlemen, or at least one of them."

"You would know them both by sight, I suppose;" said Mr. Wentworth.

"Yes, yes," said the spokesman, "perfectly."

"And perhaps," said the officer, "you would have no objection to make your peace with the public offices by contributing your share of information to bring a rogue to his deserts."

"We are quite at the service of this here gentleman, and if so be as he will give us what

assistance he can to help us into an honest line of life, we will put him into a way of finding the fellow he is in search of. He was here last night."

"Then he is not in custody?" said Mr. Wentworth.

"In custody, Lord bless you, no sir, that ere young fellow as you have taken up no more did it nor you did it."

The rest of their conversation corroborated what Atherton had told Mr. Wentworth in his private examination. And they went back that night with Mr. Wentworth, and having the following morning traced Major Martin to Nicholson's apartment in the gaol they planted themselves at the door, as has been narrated, and by the assistance of the officer made sure of their prisoner with all the evidences of guilt about him. These were the men who in an early part of this narrative were spoken of as

bringing Atherton his breakfast at the house of his first captivity in Chancery Lane. They had been long in the service of Major Martin, and were somewhat in his power as Niselson was; but they had recently been treated less courteously than usual and, what was worst of all, they had not been so liberally paid, as they supposed they had a right to expect. And seeing that their master was now in their power and they were likely to get more by his death than by his life they hesitated not to sacrifice him.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN the Major was thus apprehended and the evidences of guilt were strong around him on every side, and when Nicholson now added his less ambiguous testimony, Mr. Wentworth thought he might very safely liberate Atherton, against whom not a shadow of a charge remained.

He was therefore sent for to the magistrate's house, and was informed that he was now perfectly at liberty. It was indeed a great relief to be exonerated from the charge that had been recently hanging over him; but with

his liberty and acknowledged innocence there came this melancholy alloy, that he was now without home, kindered, relative or friend. He expressed this feeling to the worthy magistrate, who congratulated him on being thus saved from the ignominy of a public trial.

“ The want of acknowledged kindred,” said Mr. Wentworth, “ has been the means of throwing you into unfit society, whereby your principles and morals might have been seriously injured. You have been fortunate enough to escape the contamination. But I hope ere long to see you surrounded by acknowledged and respectable kindred. We have all but legal evidence that you are the son of Sir Edward Vernon. This poor man, Nicholson, whom I cannot but pity, though I am tempted to despise him, is now in a fit of penitence, and is abundantly communicative on every particular concerning you. He hopes

by these means to save his life, and I dare say, for the sake of his evidence to bring the conviction home to Martin, his life may be saved. But it must be a miserable life indeed, just perhaps one degree better than an ignominious death. From him I learn that you are acknowledged by Major Martin to be the son of Sir Edward; and if I may believe the testimony, he also informs me, that the poor youth who was murdered actually addressed the murderer by the appellation of father.—At all events, Mr. Atherton, I will give you an asylum here, till this sad affair is brought to a crisis, and till something decided is done respecting your acknowledgment by Sir Edward Vernon, or the reverse.”

“ Sir,” replied Atherton, “ I know not how to thank you for the courtesy you have already shewn me.—And if I should be acknowledged.—Has Sir Edward himself any suspicion —?”

"He has, and is anxious that he may find these suspicions corroborated."

"But he must feel reluctant to receive any but most convincing evidence, and will scarcely know how to believe Major Martin."

"He that wishes to believe," replied Mr. Wentworth, "generally knows how to believe."

"And will Major Martin be willing to acknowledge to the world that he is the murderer of his own son?"

"The world will know it without his acknowledgment," replied the magistrate; "there have been men who have gloried in the very sublimity of their guilt,—and he seems one of them.—He denies nothing that is charged against him, and boldly refuses to answer all interrogatories.—If we could find some clergyman, with whom he could be induced to speak confidentially, perhaps that might contribute to elicit the truth."

Mr. Plush was the only clergyman that Atherton knew, and he was a gentleman, who did not seem particularly well qualified to touch the heart, and unlock its recesses to attain to its secrets; and so Atherton said in replying to Mr. Wentworth.

“To a man of highly spiritual feeling,” said the magistrate, “this Martin would probably turn a deaf ear. One of a more worldly habit of mind and manner might answer the purpose better. You are acquainted with this Mr. Plush? You will have no objection perhaps to write to him, and to bring him down; —the excursion may be an agreeable change to him.”

Atherton consented to write to Mr. Plush; and the benevolent magistrate now hastened to Vernon Park that he might in person have the pleasure of communicating to his good friends the intelligence of Atherton's liberation.

"I knew it must be so," exclaimed Charlotte Vernon, not loud enough to be heard by any more than her father and uncle between whom she was sitting, when Mr. Wentworth entered the apartment, and made his announcement; but that exclamation was an additional inducement to Sir Edward Vernon to wish that there might be truth in the conjecture which he had formed concerning Atherton.

"I am delighted with the intelligence," said the worthy baronet hastily rising from his seat and cordially pressing his friend's hand, "and where is this persecuted and falsely accused youth?"

"For the present he remains at my house," answered Mr. Wentworth.

Sir Edward Vernon, who was preparing himself to recognize in the person of Atherton his first born and now only son, felt by anticipation an intense interest in him and even now

regarding him as his own son, with all the cordiality of delighted gratitude thanked Mr. Wentworth for his considerate kindness.

But the narrative must now follow to the metropolis, the letter which Atherton, at the suggestion of Mr. Wentworth, wrote to his reverend friend Mr. Plush.—Great was the surprise of this gentleman at receiving a letter from Yorkshire, and greater still was his surprise when he read as follows:—

Rev. and dear Sir,

Through a variety of scenes have I passed since last I had the pleasure of meeting you in London. I have been disguised as a criminal, I have embarked as a fugitive, I have been arrested as a murderer;—and now I am again at liberty,—at liberty save from the restraints of a generous hospitality, which gives me a home at the house of that gentleman, before

whom I was dragged as a culprit. But by these changes an unseen wisdom is probably leading to retribution and justice. The murderer, I hesitate not to call him so, is apprehended,—and before this letter reaches you he will be fully committed to York castle. I trembled once, lest I should be placed at the bar as a criminal. It is indeed a painful situation in which I am yet placed; and I sometimes discontentedly imagine that life has nothing of good to give us, but an occasional alleviation of pain, and a transient drying of our tears. I begin however to see some prospect of gaining that station which I have long suspected to be my birthright—and it is in your power perhaps to assist me. Major Martin has virtually acknowledged me to be the son of Sir Edward Vernon, and it is suggested to me by my most excellent friend Mr. Wentworth, that the conversation of a cler-

gyman may be the means of inducing this man to give such an explicit acknowledgment as to put the matter quite out of doubt. You are the only clergyman I know. May I request of you that for my sake, for the sake of justice, and for the sake of your old friend, my late worthy master, who, with all his oddities, would, I am sure, be glad to hear of my well being,—may I request of you to come down to York, and to talk to this unfortunate man. You may touch his heart if he has any. You may do me a lasting benefit which will never be forgotten.

Believe me ever faithfully yours,

F. Atherton.

P.S. At Mr. Wentworth's request the enclosed note is added to defray incidental expenses.

When Mr. Plush had read this letter twice over, he said "odzooks" and "odsbobs," many

times over, and with much agitation. And he called his old woman, and said to her, " Here's a pretty kettle of fish Mrs. Morris. I am sent for down into Yorkshire, to go and see a convicted—oh—no—an accused murderer—but he will be convicted, I have no doubt. Upon my word, Mrs. Morris, I cannot say I like this Tyburn work. Talking to a man who is going to be hanged is almost as bad as talking to a ghost."

" Well then," said the rude domestic, " if you don't like it don't go. What signifies all this fuss about the matter. Besides I wonder why they should send for you of all people in the world. You are only fit to read prayers on a weekly day."

" Indeed, Mrs. Morris, let me tell you I might have been ordinary of Newgate if I had used my interest about the matter; but I don't like anything that makes me low spirited, and

just at the time of that vacancy there was a poor fellow going to be hanged for sheep-stealing, a man that I used frequently to meet at Merlin's Cave, in Spafields, and had played at skittles with him the very day before he was taken up. Though to be sure if I had known that he had been a sheep-stealer, I should have thought it beneath the dignity of my cloth to play at skittles with him.—We meet with strange characters in the world.”

“ But are you going to Yorkshire, or are you going to dinner ? ”

“ I am most certainly going to dine, and I fear I must go into Yorkshire ; for you see they have sent me money.”

“ You can send the money back.”

“ I can if I like, but I don't like.”

“ Then go at once ; and make no more ado about it. I'll go and air your linen while you

are eating your dinner. And I warrant I can take care of the house in your absence."

"Ay, ay, Mrs. Morris, take care of yourself, and don't you be too free of your visits to the Magpie."

Mrs. Morris did not hear the last part of the exhortation, for Mr. Plush, who thought it was his duty to give the exhortation, thought it a matter of prudence to utter it in such a key that it could hardly be heard.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. PLUSH, who had now fully made up his mind to comply with Atherton's request, bestirred himself to make preparation for his visit to York, and for his colloquy with the accused man.—With the generalities of religious ministration, Mr. Plush was intimately and familiarly acquainted, and he could do with great dexterity and rapidity whatever was presented to him in an orderly arranged form. Whatever had been done by him in that way, had been done with such a mechanical and

unreflecting spirit, that he had become a kind of religious machine; for no thought or reflection had ever mingled with or prompted any of his utterings.

Now unfortunately for him there was no form prescribed, whereby he could be guided in his interview with Major Martin, and he thought that it would be a sad and not improbable thing that he should go to York and be closeted with the criminal and be unable to say a word in the way of exhortation or of the extortion of secret. He recollected however that he had heard that there were many books published on the subject of religion in its various modifications of application to the interests and circumstances of humanity. Therefore he went to Paternoster Row, and looked over many lists of religious books, but he found none, that would exactly answer his purpose, and he was very shy of exposing his

professional inaptitude, so that he did not say what it was that he wanted.

After a long and fruitless search, however, finding no book to suit the purpose precisely and pointedly, he resolved on purchasing 'The Whole Duty of Man,' which he supposed to be, from its title, the most comprehensive of all such publications, and containing, at least, something that might be serviceable, if not by way of direction, yet peradventure by way of suggestion.—This book he carried with him resolving to peruse it during his journey, that he might be prepared, on his arrival at York, for effectually encountering the culprit. But owing to one circumstance or another, such as the communicative loquacity of his fellow-travellers, his own occasional disposition to drowsiness, the occasional jumbling of the vehicle over the then barbarously rough roads, so that he could not hold the volume steadily

in his hand, to say nothing of his own general indisposition to that or any other kind of reading, and his inaptitude to understand what he read, or to remember it ten minutes, he derived little or no assistance from the volume that he carried with him. Therefore when he arrived at York, he was as ill qualified to meet the culprit as when he first received Atherton's letter.

"My dear fellow," said he to Atherton whom he found at York with Mr. Wentworth, "how could you think of sending for me on such an errand as this? I am willing to do anything to serve you, but positively I know not what secrets I can extort from this man, that may not as well be extracted from him by yourself, or this worthy gentleman."

"Gentlemen of your cloth," said Mr. Wentworth, "are privileged to be more free in your interrogatories than laymen, to persons

situated as is this unhappy man, who now awaits his trial ; and as you are an acquaintance of my young friend, and know probably some passages in his early history, you may probably be of some service to us in carrying on the investigation.—Are you altogether unacquainted with Major Martin ?”

“ Most completely so,” replied Mr. Plush, “ I am not aware that I have ever seen him in the whole course of my life. And from what I have heard of him I cannot say that I have much coveted acquaintance with him.”

“ Very likely not,” said Mr. Wentworth, “ but on the present occasion, when you may be spiritually serviceable to him, and temporally serviceable to your young friend here, you will probably not decline an introduction to him. If you will give me leave I will introduce you myself, and will give you an order to see him at any time.”

Mr. Plush consented; and having in his pocket 'The Whole Duty of Man,' and being supported by a magistrate, he had not much embarrassment; but he felt some little coldness of awe creep shudderingly through his veins as he entered the great gates of the castle. "A m-m-agnificent b-b-uilding!" exclaimed Mr. Plush who had never before seen the castle.—And as they were proceeding towards the apartment or cell, where Martin was confined, one of the turnkeys met them, and, bowing to the worthy magistrate, said, "If you are going to the cell of the prisoner Martin, please your worship, his wife is with him now."

"His wife!" said Mr. Wentworth in a tone of astonishment and grief. The tears almost fell from the good man's eyes as his imagination rapidly-painted to him the mental agony, which that poor woman must suffer, who visita

in a prison a husband who is charged, and to all appearances justly, with having murdered his own child. He waited therefore in the castle yard, but not many minutes, for presently the poor woman came out staggering in an agony of grief, and blind to all that was about her. The turnkey, who had addressed Mr. Wentworth, stepped forward to support the afflicted creature; and then she looked upwards to the sky as one who would pray with an energetic fervour, and ask if there be any consolation in heaven for one who has no hope on earth. Her eyes then wandered wildly round the building, and when they looked enquiringly towards Mr. Wentworth and Mr. Plush, the turnkey, pointing to the former, said to her that the gentleman was a magistrate. At the word she rushed forward, and threw herself convulsively at his feet exclaiming, in an agony of emotion, "Oh,

save him, Sir, save him. Let him live to repent—Yes, yes—he will repent.—His heart is hard, but it may be softened. Oh—Sir, let him not die in the hardness of his heart!”

Mr. Plush trembled from head to foot at the moving scene, and wished himself back at his lodgings at Doctor's Commons. It was easy and pleasant enough to read prayers at St. Andrew's or at St. Dunstan's, but the conflict with passionate emotion was too much for him. Wishing also to put a stop to this public exhibition, the worthy magistrate, accompanied by Mr. Plush and Mrs. Martin, adjourned to an apartment in the governor's house.

“My good woman,” said Mr. Wentworth, “you should consider that your husband, if this be your husband, is at present only accused, not convicted—”

“Oh but he is guilty—”

"Nay, nay," interrupted Mr. Wentworth, "it becomes you not to speak thus."

"Alas, Sir, I know not what I say, my brain is turned,—my heart is withered, I am more than miserable—I am beyond pity—I am past hope."

Mr. Wentworth spoke soothingly to her; "Poor woman, I do pity you, and would do anything in my power to serve you, but till you can compose yourself a little, what can I say?"

Many hysteric sobbings followed, and Mr. Wentworth patiently waited till they subsided, and then when the sufferer could speak intelligibly, and listen somewhat composedly, he asked her concerning her husband, and she told him, as has been already narrated, how that her husband had deserted her many years ago, and how that, after a long interval, he took from her the son, which had been so great

a trouble to her, and had imposed him on Sir Edward Vernon. And then she told how kindly Atherton had behaved to her in giving her the means of coming down into Yorkshire to see the remains of her murdered child.

“And was that indeed your son?” asked Mr. Wentworth.

“He was indeed, Sir,” replied Mrs. Martin, “and you may—no—you cannot judge what I felt—when I saw—and knew that he had perished by—”

“You seem indeed to have been exceedingly unfortunate both in your husband and your son,” said the magistrate, “it almost astonishes me that you have retained so much affection for them, they neither of them seem to have deserved your love.”

“I never loved any but them, and it was because I loved them that they broke my heart. For my husband I left the home of my father,

with my child I have walked a beggar in the streets, when, but for his sake, I would willingly have died, though death had come upon me by the slow pains of hunger ;—yes, Sir, I could have withered away from the world contentedly, but I bore about within my living bosom a broken heart that I might be a shelter to the little one—”

She paused, and there was no answer to be given to her, for a grief like hers is not to be reached by argument.—It was not in Mr. Wentworth’s nature to leave unfriended any one whom he could assist ; he therefore gave such directions concerning this poor woman, that whatever comforts she was able to enjoy might not be lacking to her. And having parted from her with promises of all practical assistance, he and Mr. Plush proceeded to the apartment of the accused.

“ He has perhaps been softened by the visit of this poor woman, for she seems not to be of that temperament which could heap reproaches on any one, however cruel their behaviour.” So said Mr. Wentworth, and so hoped his companion; but when they entered the room where the prisoner was confined, they saw no symptoms of emotion of any kind, nor the tremblings of guilt nor the paleness of fear, but the hard, iron-like features retained their passionless immobility;—the cool eye still kept its steady gaze, and calm commanding look. He was sitting on a bench, his arms were folded across his bosom, and he regarded his visitors with no more recognition than had they been animals of a different species.

Mr. Wentworth addressed the prisoner; “ I have brought a clergyman to visit you, in whose conversation perhaps you may find some

consolation and assistance; and as often as you choose to receive this gentleman, orders are given that he may be admitted to you."

Martin at this speech fixed his eyes very coolly on Mr. Plush, and, slightly frowning, said, "Have I seen you before?"

Mr. Plush trembling almost at the voice of the accused murderer, hastily answered, "Can't say, can't say, indeed,—I lodge in Knight Rider Street, Doctor's Commons, and read prayers at St. Andrew's, and sometimes at St. Dunstan's, and sometimes at one place and sometimes at another,—perhaps you may have seen me at the Pewter Platter in Cross Street, Hatton Garden."

"Do you read prayers there too?—I know none of the places you have mentioned."

Mr. Wentworth left the parties together, and when the door of the room was shut upon them, Martin, seeing that Mr. Plush was not

very much at his ease, said to him, " Sit down, Sir, and open your commission."

" My commission, Mr. Martin, is—is—is to visit you as a clergyman,"—replied Mr. Plush fumbling in his side pocket, and preparing, if need should be, to draw forth ' The Whole Duty of Man.'

" Well then, Sir, fulfil your commission, and visit me as a clergyman, though I cannot say that I exactly know what you mean."

" Nor I neither," thought Mr. Plush. And then there was a dead pause—After which Mr. Plush spoke again, saying, " Shall I read to you?"

" Read what?" said the Major.

" Some good book," replied Mr. Plush.

" There have been few good books published lately," answered Martin.

" I have ' The Whole Duty of Man,' in my pocket," responded Mr. Plush.

"Then keep it there," said the Major.

"Five shillings thrown away for nothing," soliloquized Mr. Plush, "for I am sure I shall never read it myself."

"Shall I read prayers?"

"At St. Andrew's or at St. Dunstan's or at the Pewter Platter if you please, but not in my hearing."

"Do you not wish to hear prayers read?"

"I have heard them once or twice in the course of my life, and I do not wish to hear them any more."

Mr. Plush was put a little more at ease by the exceeding easiness of the prisoner, who seemed to have nothing murderous in his look or manner. Indeed the reverend gentleman was almost astonished at himself, that he had no more sensations of horror and disgust; but the fact was that his imagination was not so

active as he thought it to be; and seeing nothing before him but a human being not besmeared with blood, nor armed with murderous weapons, nor scowling with tremendous fury, but looking calmly cynical and coolly indifferent, Mr. Plush could not invest this placid figure with what his obscure imagination conceived to be the attributes of a murderer.— Recovering therefore his presence of mind, which was all he could recover, for dexterity of mental management he never had possessed, Mr Plush said, “What then shall I say?”

“Say what you are sent to say, and have done with it. I need no spiritual assistance, and if I did, you do not seem to be the man to give it to me.”

“I am not accustomed to this sort of thing certainly,” replied Mr. Plush, “my religious

occupation has been for the most part reading prayers."

"And a very religious occupation you have made it, no doubt," replied Mr. Martin.

"You are inclined to be facetious," said Mr. Plush.

"No, Sir," answered the Major, "few persons are inclined to be facetious when the gallows is staring them in the face through a short vista of slender hopes, and doubtful fears. What I may do when I stand on the scaffold with the executioner by my side, when hope is gone, and fear has done its worst, I cannot say;—jokes have passed between the victim and the executioner."

At the word executioner, the blood ran cold in the veins of Mr. Plush, and he replied,

• "But,—but—you are not convicted—you are only accused."

"If I am not convicted, I am condemned."

"Condemned!"

"Ay—condemned;—for whom the world condemns, the jury rarely acquits."

"But if you are not guilty, and if you can prove—"

"Psha—" said the Major impatiently, "to your business. You are sent here to worm out secrets. Now what questions have you to ask? I can see through you all."

Mr. Plush was confounded, he had to deal with one who was by no means manageable, nor was Mr. Plush himself any manager with whomsoever he might have to deal. He therefore looked not wisely.

"Now as you seem to be at a loss to ask me a question, if you will give me leave, I will ask you one.—Is Nicholson yet admitted king's evidence?"

"I believe not yet," said Mr. Plush.

"Then go to Mr. Wentworth, and to Sir Edward Vernon, and tell them thus.—There are two persons accused of having committed a murder ;—it will be difficult to convict one without the evidence of the other ;—let me be admitted as evidence against Nicholson, and then Sir Edward Vernon shall have the secret he is fishing for, and shall know who, what, and where his son is—Without this concession, I carry the secret with me to the gallows, and to the grave." Mr. Plush looked all amazement—"Now, Sir, lose no time ;" continued the Major, "Off to your employers ; tell them they may hang me if they please, but not for a fool—they shall not trifle with me."

Mr. Plush found that 'The Whole Duty of Man' was of no manner of use to him ; and

that he had annoyed himself with a great load in his pocket, all to no purpose. And he almost wished the Major hanged that he might not live to utter sneers on 'The Whole Duty of Man.'

CHAPTER XV.

MR. PLUSH was not sorry when his interview with Major Martin was at an end.

"I never saw," said he to Atherton, "such a ruthless fellow in the whole course of my existence, he seems to care for nothing, and for nobody.—And does he claim you for his son? Why you are no more like him than chalk is like cheese."

"Can you make any impression on the prisoner?" asked Mr. Wentworth.

"No more impression," replied Mr. Plush, "than I could on one of the castle walls. His

heart is as hard as the nether millstone. Indeed I think he has no heart."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Wentworth, "when his trial is over, and he sees that he has but few hours to live, he may be moved by penitence to make some amends for his past misdeeds."

Mr. Plush would fain have surrendered all the profits of his excursion, could he by that surrender have transported himself back again to his lodgings in Knight Rider Street, Doctor's Commons. For he began to fear that he might be detained in York till the trial and condemnation of Martin, and might perhaps be destined to compose one of the melancholy group at the execution. The very thought spoiled all the pleasure of the excursion, and did not seem to be by any means adequately repaid by its profits.

"I am sure," said Mr. Plush with great

eagerness, "that nothing that I can say will make the slightest impression."—And then the reverend gentleman told the magistrate the conditions on which the prisoner offered to make such disclosures as might be satisfactory to Sir Edward Vernon. Turning to Atherton, Mr. Plush continued, "Now if you have any interest with the parties concerned, and can procure the arrangement that the prisoner Martin requires, you may save his life, and get yourself comfortably and satisfactorily placed in the station that seems to belong to you."

Atherton would scarcely suffer Mr. Plush to finish the sentence, when rising from his chair with a passionate vehemence he exclaimed, "Never—never—Sooner than be a party to such an act of selfish injustice as that, I would waste my whole life, and shorten it too, with the basest and most wearisome toil, that poverty ever submitted to for a morsel of

bread.”—Then addressing himself to Mr. Wentworth he said ; “ Sir, I thank you with a feeling of gratitude that I can never express, for your generous kindness—why should I encroach upon it any longer. When this wicked man has told you his secret, supposing it ever should be extorted from him, how can you be sure that it will point to me as the son of Sir Edward Vernon ?—Let justice take its course—Let not my presence, or any imagined interests of mine, be the means of adding to the sad cares and sorrows of my worthy friends. I have a foster father in India, I shall be welcome to the shelter of his roof, to a share of his purse, and may by him be introduced to the means of providing for my maintenance and well being. I have already, notwithstanding the many buffetings through which I have passed in the brief cours of my life, had honours to which I never thought of

aspiring. I have been honoured by your kindness, and by the friendship of Sir Edward Vernon. And these will be pleasant recollections to me as long as I live.—You will give me leave, Sir, to return to London with Mr. Plush—”

“I shall be very glad of your company,” interrupted Mr. Plush, “for my fellow travellers down were all strangers; and it is pleasanter travelling with an acquaintance than with perfect strangers.”

“Nay, nay, my young friend, you are too hasty,” said Mr. Wentworth, addressing himself to Atherton, “the presumptive evidence that you are the son of Sir Edward Vernon, is quite as strong as the evidence that Martin was the murderer of the unfortunate young man who passed so lately for Mr. Vernon. At all events I must lay my commands on you, that

you remain here till after the trial. While there is life, there is hope. And when this wretched man shall have been convicted, as I have no doubt that he must be, we shall then perhaps see a change in his spirit.—You will not think of leaving Yorkshire till you have taken leave of Sir Edward Vernon. Now as I must call at Vernon Park in my way back to Halifax, you may as well accompany me thither: and if Mr. Plush will also favour us with his company, we may even yet devise some means of getting out of this perplexity;—for I feel a confidence that matters would not have been brought to this degree of *eclaircissement*, unless it were designed that the mystery should be thoroughly developed.”

To this movement Mr. Plush made no objection; for Vernon Park gave him the idea of a pleasant mansion, and an abode of peace

and luxury, far more to his taste than the gloomy cells and penitential abodes of York castle.

Atherton, as the party entered the park gates, and as again that pleasant mansion stood before him, felt emotions such as he had never felt before. Hopes, fears, terrors, regrets, sentiments of gratitude, thoughts of tenderness, memory of his escape from the accident which he had since reason to interpret into intention, shudderings of dread at the thought of the shepherd's glen, doubts of his destiny now settling into confidence, and anon vibrating back to the opposite extremity of despair, laid such hold of his feelings, that his whole frame trembled, and he scarcely knew whether pain or pleasure predominated in his emotions.

Happy for him he was not immediately in-

introduced to the party then in the house, but was consigned to the library, where he found only his good friend Dr. Johnson; by the gravity of whose manners, and the didactic style of whose talk, our hero's perturbation was rather allayed than increased.

But Mr. Wentworth found Sir Edward Vernon in a state of mind not favourable to the reception of doubtful intelligence or the continuance of a wearying suspense. The magistrate in a few words told the worthy baronet of all that had taken place at York, of the interview with Martin's wife, and the assurances of the poor woman that the murdered youth was her son, of the vain endeavour that Mr. Plush had made to extort the secret from the prisoner, and of the stipulation that Martin had made as the condition of giving a satisfactory elucidation of the mystery.

"And can it be so?" said Sir Edward

Vernon, "anything to relieve me from this dreadful state of mind."

"Can it be so?"—repeated the magistrate, "surely, Sir Edward, you must be aware that it cannot.—Even on the supposition that the guilt of the two prisoners were equal, it would be unfair to the first that was apprehended to make him the sufferer, when it was by his means that the other was taken, and when intimation had been given him that he might escape. And I am sure it is not in your nature to let the great principles of public justice be rendered subservient to the purposes of private feeling."

"Certainly not, most certainly not," replied Sir Edward Vernon, "but I knew not what I said. My sufferings have made me selfish. You must be my friend—you are my friend, and I will rely on you that you will use your best judgement to relieve me from this sad

suspense. I am not competent to act for myself.—But who are those that came with you?—You were not alone.”

“Atherton is one,” replied Mr. Wentworth, “and Mr. Plush, the clergyman of whom I have been speaking, is the other. As we brought him all the way from London to help us out in this enquiry, I thought that we ought not to neglect him ; therefore I took the liberty to bring him with me.”

“Ay, ay, right, certainly,” replied Sir Edward, “I shall be very glad to see him. And where is young Atherton, let me see him too. I should be almost sorry, if the wicked man Martin should be able to convince me that any other than this young man is my son. I should be proud to acknowledge him, could I do it with assured justice.”

At the desire of Sir Edward Vernon, Mr. Plush and Atherton were introduced to him.

Now this was the first time that Atherton had seen Sir Edward Vernon since Nicholson's letter hastened him off abruptly to London, as recorded above ; and it was also the first time of meeting since the minds of both parties had been occupied with an apprehension of consanguinity ; and their meeting was of greater interest of feeling than of expression.

Mr. Plush, as being the greatest stranger, received the first notice of the baronet, and when their eyes met, there seemed to be, on both sides, a start or stop of doubtful recognition.

"Surely, sir, I have seen you before," said Sir Edward Vernon.

"I was thinking the very same thing," answered Mr. Plush.

"You have officiated at a church in the city?"

"There are very few churches in the city that I have not officiated at," replied Mr. Plush.

"I do verily believe," said Sir Edward Vernon, addressing himself to Mr. Wentworth, "that this is the gentleman who officiated at the church in Lothbury where I was first married."

Mr. Plush looked thoughtful for a few seconds and then exclaimed, "Odzooks, I certainly believe it was; but the truth is that in the course of my laborious life I have performed so many marriages that I cannot remember a tithe of them. I have married folks of all descriptions gentle and simple. On Easter Monday I married a dozen couple at different churches. Now you mention it, did not you marry a pretty Miss Edwards, a daughter of Edwards the hop-factor?"

"I did," replied Sir Edward Vernon with a sigh.

"Ay goed, I remember it now as well as if it were but last week : and I remember too," said Mr. Plush with a lively and grateful emphasis, "that I never received such a liberal fee, before nor since, as I did on that occasion. You were a gay young spark then, you were not Sir Edward at that time I believe. I saw it was a stolen match and I took the readiest way to keep it secret, for I made a point of forgetting it as soon as I could. You were then just such another as this young gentleman here," pointing to Atherton. "Now it strikes me," continued the loquacious clergyman addressing himself to Mr. Wentworth, "that there is no necessity for Sir Edward Vernon to trouble himself about any confession of that wicked man Martin ; indeed he is so wicked

that I don't like to talk to him ; for it is as plain as can be, that the young gentleman standing here is the son of Sir Edward. There is all the evidence that can be for it."

" We have reason to think it may be," said Sir Edward, " and I most heartily hope that it may be. Every presumption that is so, is a relief to my spirit."

Atherton was touched to the heart by the kind and flattering expression of Sir Edward, and he grasped the baronet's hand passionately, and kissing it sank down on one knee, and while the unchecked tears flowed down his cheeks he said, " Be you my father, or be you my friend, I ask your blessing, and return you my thanks,-thanks-thanks for kindness, which will cling to my memory as long as I live."

And the baronet was deeply moved, and inclining his head downwards, towards the

kneeling youth, said, with much difficulty,
 "May God bless you, my dear — friend."

Mr. Plush was glad when the scene was
 over, for he did not like emotions.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE party at Vernon Park was now rather numerous for so quiet and retired a man as Sir Edward Vernon. But with its numbers there was nothing like gaiety. A deep and settled gloom dwelt upon almost every individual; even Lady Vernon, who rejoiced to utter her democratic sentiments to the annoyance of Dr. Johnson, had ever since the dreadful affair of the shepherd's glen ceased to drink Wilkes and Liberty after dinner; and though the deceased had been quite the reverse of a favorite with her ladyship, yet she felt for the

gloom which hung on the spirits of Sir Edward Vernon. Many were the fears and apprehensions entertained lest the agitation might be too much for him. His health seemed to be severely affected, and his whole system was manifestly shaken; and when, after the space of a few days, Mr. Wentworth, who had been to Halifax in the interval, returned to Vernon Park, in his way to York, and urged upon Sir Edward Vernon the necessity for his being at York during the assizes, the worthy baronet seemed to feel the effort to be too much for him. He trembled at the very mention of the trial, and manifested a nervous irritability at the idea of his name being thus on every one's tongue. And it was not till Mr. Wentworth promised to arrange the journey so that he might enter the city after dusk, that he would consent to go.

“ But my young friend must go with us,”

said the baronet. It was by this name that he always spoke of Atherton; and as our hero was of a grateful disposition, he came to regard Sir Edward Vernon with a delighted affection; and was studiously attentive to him. They were indeed inseparable, and the worthy baronet never appeared so happy as when conversing with Atherton concerning his supposed mother.

During the whole of the journey from Vernon Park to the city of York, the attention of the baronet was exclusively occupied with talk on the probability or improbability of obtaining convincing and legal evidence that Atherton was his son. He was assured in his mind that it must be so, but it needed some decisive corroboration from the man, who had the secret in his own power, and who seemed reluctant to part with it except on terms which could not be conceded.

Mr. Plush and Dr. Johnson were of the party that went to York. Mr. Vernon and his daughter remained at Vernon Park as companions for Lady Vernon, whose rough and boisterous spirits had been mightily subdued by the melancholy event, and whose fears for its effects on the health of Sir Edward Vernon were seriously excited.

Now when the party were arrived at York, their first and most serious consultation was concerning the most probably effectual mode of gaining the information, for which all were so anxious. For both Sir Edward Vernon and Atherton were in excellent esteem with all who knew them; and the baronet's brother, though by the discovery he would be deprived of the succession, felt so much on Sir Edward's behalf, and had so great a regard for Atherton, that he most heartily wished that all might be as every one had reason to expect;—more.

especially did he so wish and hope after the acknowledgment which his daughter had made of her attachment to Atherton.

Amidst the consultation Mr. Plush was rather passive than active, except so far as he was active in professing his incompetence to grapple confessionally with such a sturdy sinner as Martin, whose heart, if he had one, seemed totally inaccessible by the ordinary approaches. Dr. Johnson, who had it not in his nature to be afraid of the face of man, and in whose heart was ever an unreluctant readiness to do a good action for a good man, proffered at length his services, saying, "If the unprofessional exhortations of a layman may reach the secrets of this poor man's heart, I will essay according to the best of my ability."

They thanked him for the offer and predicted his success, nor was Mr. Plush at all jealous of his rival, for his ambition was not touched by

the rivalry. He consented, however, to remain with the party till after the trial, that he might, if need should be, attend at the execution, provided that there should be no discovery made before.

It is almost needless to remark here, that there was not for a moment any thought or intention of admitting Martin as evidence against Nicholson; but that on the other hand Nicholson had his frightened and worthless life spared to him on condition of bearing testimony against the Major. This the Major knew, and for it he was prepared; his spirit, however, quailed not, nor was there in his heart the least degree of, or approach to relenting. He sat in the solitude of his dungeon calm, and cold as the stones of the wall that surrounded him. When Dr. Johnson was introduced to him by name, for the very turnkeys of the gaol seemed to know Dr. Johnson, the prisoner

looked upon his visitor with such a calm indifference, that the doctor could hardly believe that the individual before him was within a few days of an ignominious death, and that he was conscious of the guilt of blood.

“Your name is Martin?” said the doctor doubtfully.

“My name is Martin,” said the prisoner, “and your message to me is of the same nature as that which was brought by a shallow-pated priest a few days ago. Your employer knows my terms, and he may—and perhaps will know my inflexibility.—Do you bring me word that my life is to be saved?”

“I do not bring any message concerning your life. If on your trial your innocence be made to appear, your life will be saved, if otherwise, it will be justly forfeited to an offended law.”

“It is decided then that I must take my trial?”

“ It is ;—and if you be apprehensive that the result of that trial will be to hasten your appearance at the tribunal of the Almighty, does it not become you, while the day of mercy lasts, to avail yourself of its opportunities, and to make your peace with God ?”

“ Such talk does not suit my taste, I could utter it as well as you, or if disposed to play the hypocrite, I could echo your awful sounds, in good set phrase.”

“ Will you speak thus when the apparatus of death is about you ?”

“ I have seen the apparatus of death a thousand times, and have never flinched from it. And when there is nothing worth living for, death is as welcome as life.”

“ Yet even now you would cling to life. Sir, you deceive yourself most awfully if you imagine, in the effervescence of a momentary boldness, that death is not dreadful. It is

dreadful to the best prepared. And how must it be to those who are unprepared !”

“ I know of no better preparation for death,” replied the Major, “ than a weariness of life.”

The worthy moralist shuddered, and replied in solemn tones, “ It must be a miracle indeed that can awake such a benumbed and torpid soul to any sense of feeling !—If you have no fear of God, have you no regard for man ?”

“ None.”

“ Have you no sympathy with human sorrows, no gratitude for kindness, no sentiment of generosity ? Can you carry to the grave with you, a secret that, revealed, would lighten the weight on your own bosom, and bless one who has been a generous benefactor to you ?”

“ When I was a boy,” replied the prisoner, “ I thought such words had a meaning ; but a wise and selfish world has taught me a better lesson ; and I regard them now as the music

of the wind that sighs through the gratings of my prison, soft and melodious in their sound, and nothing more."

Dr. Johnson, who, by habit and constitution, rejoiced greatly in the conflicts of words, and the wrestlings of keen-sighted reason, felt here that no victory was to be won, and no trophy to be grained. He was almost astonished at the corroboration, which his senses received of the truth of what he had heard from Mr. Wentworth, touching the utter heartlessness of the prisoner.

"Will you," said Dr. Johnson after a little pause, "consent to see Sir Edward Vernon."

"The magistrates may send whomsoever they may please into my cell," replied the Major, "but if you fancy that I am to be trifled with as a weak puppet, or to be moved by the whinings of sentimentality, you are wrong. When I once resolve, nothing moves

me—nothing changes me—no not even blood, be it my own, or that of another.”

The worthy moralist uttered a pious ejaculation which, whether or not it reached the prisoner's ear, moved him neither to remorse nor scorn. And when the doctor returned to his party and reported the total failure of his efforts to awaken moral feeling in the prisoner's mind, it seemed to them all as a message of evil tidings, and their spirits sunk lower and lower still. Mr. Plush alone had any feeling of satisfaction. It was slight, but still it was a satisfaction that he had done as much with the prisoner as Dr. Johnson himself had been able to effect.

One faint hope yet remained, and that was the effect which might be produced by the trial, and by the conviction and sentence, which in all probability would follow. On the morning of the trial the court was crowded to

excess; none of the Vernon party was present except Dr. Johnson, who by especial favor obtained a seat on the bench. The description of the trial, so far as concerns the purposes of this narrative may as well be given in the words of the doctor who related what he had heard and seen, to Mr. Wentworth and Mr. Plush and Atherton, for Sir Edward Vernon was too ill to be of the party.

"Sir," said the doctor, in answer to Mr. Wentworth's enquiry concerning the behaviour of the prisoner, "the story is soon told, but I must say that I have this day received an impression, that will not quit my memory so long as that faculty retains its power.—The court was as full, as a room could possibly be, and there was on every countenance, as far as my imperfect sight could reach, a look of the most intense and absorbing interest. It seemed also to be the general feeling that the individual

whom the prisoner had slain was his own son ; and when the clanking of the chains was heard, and the wretched man stood up to hear his indictment read, a general shudder pervaded the assembly, and here and there were heard some louder symptoms of expressed contempt, which the judge had much difficulty to silence. At all this however the prisoner exhibited not the slightest emotion, there was no downcast look of humiliation, no quailing of fear, no tremblings of an uncertain hope, no look that asked for pity, and no scowl that breathed defiance and contempt. And when asked whether to that indictment he pleaded guilty or not guilty, he replied in a loud and steady tone of voice, " Not guilty."—Sir, it was next to impossible to imagine that the man who stood there, was standing with a rope round his neck. His voice was as loud and clear and untremulous as any voice in the court, save

that of the crier, who was frequently, and vainly demanding silence from the pressed and pressing multitude. Then the man who found the body was examined, and while he was giving his testimony, the prisoner, with his arms folded, stood looking earnestly, but without perturbation on the witness. Several individuals near me said occasionally to one another, 'Is it possible that this man can be guilty?'—Then came the avizance of his accomplice Nicholson. It was a sorry sight to see that man. He trembled in every joint, and seemed afraid to move his eyes, like one that dreads to see a spectre. It was long before he could modulate his voice to a pitch of audibility. He was pale with watching, his eyes were sunk in their dark sockets, his cheeks were yellow and collapsed; and at every question he started like one electrified; and the contrast between the accused and the witness

was, that in one, you saw the calm courage, and in the other, the mean cowardice of guilt. Sir, it was a sight not soon to be forgotten. It was the opening up of such specimens of humanity as are not to be seen every day. Then came another witness, the man who was one that apprehended the prisoner, and found the murderous weapon in his possession. The weapon was produced, to the horror of all save him whom most it concerned. As each witness was examined, the prisoner was asked by the court, if he wished to put any questions to them;—except in the case of Nicholson he answered ‘No.’ But when that man had given his evidence, the prisoner called to him aloud by name, and then for the first time, and as if involuntarily, the eyes of the witness met those of the prisoner. And as the frightened man before seemed anxious not to turn his eyes in that direction, so now he seemed most careful

not to withdraw them. He stood for a few seconds fascinated—at length the prisoner said, ‘I spare you,’ and the craven fainted as he left the box.”

Here, for a moment, the doctor paused. “And what,” said Mr. Wentworth, “was the verdict?”

“Guilty,—of course—”

“Did he make any defence?”

“None; but when called upon he calmly replied, ‘The court does not expect one.’ Then farther, when the judge asked what the prisoner had to say that sentence of death should not be passed on him, he replied, ‘Nothing.’ So did he deport himself during the whole trial, and a more impenetrable and obdurate heart never beat in a human bosom.”

“You heard the sentence passed?”

“I did;—and it was a most moving scene

to all but the prisoner. He was the centre to which all eyes were directed, some with pity, some with anger, some with stern contempt, and all with curiosity and interest, and not many without tears.—Had it been a sentence of three days' imprisonment, he could not have heard it with more indifference.—It has moved me and distressed me. I cannot get rid of the painful impression. There are darkneses in the human heart, but such an utter blackness as this I never witnessed or even suspected. Sir, there is nothing so degrading to man as an intellectual being, or so injurious to him, as a moral agent, as sporting with death, and regarding it with indifference. It is freezing the very fountain of all emotion and the spring of all moral action. If you cannot reach the heart by touching the life, all the bonds of humanity are broken, and man becomes a demon."

“ He may peradventure,” replied Mr. Wentworth, “ he yet moved. The certainty of approaching death and public ignominy may, in the solitude of his dungeon, awaken him.”

CHAPTER XVII.

It was Sunday afternoon. The execution of the prisoner was to take place at an early hour on Monday morning. Since the time of his trial he had been in the same careless state of mind as he had been at and before it. He had spurned resolutely, but not violently, all offers of religious consolation or exhortation. He was regarded with astonishment by those whom duty had brought near him, and they one and all looked forward to the moment when his firmness should be shaken and the frost of

his soul should be broken up and his whole spirit melted into a tumultuous penitence.

“ I will see him once more,” said Dr. Johnson, “ before the hour arrives for his dismissal from life.”

The city was full of people, the day was fine, the afternoon service was over at the churches, and all the streets were soberly alive with quiet and well dressed passengers walking about to admire streets and churches, that they had never seen before, and to fill up their time till the great exhibition. Many of them thought that day but little of their devotions, all tongues were talking lowly and seriously of the man who had created such a sensation. It was an impressive sight to the great moralist, to contemplate as he went towards the castle, the multitude of persons who were loitering about in Sabbath indolence. The singularity of his

figure and gait attracted their attention, and to some of them he was not unknown by fame; they whispered his name to one another as he passed; and a slight whisper of that kind soon catches the ear; he was pleased with the involuntary homage. He entered the cell of the prisoner in a mood of gentleness, and prepared for mild expostulation.

"Will you hear me once more, unhappy man, before you pass to your great account?"

"You have the reputation, Dr. Johnson," said the prisoner, "of being a man of understanding. Can you not understand enough to know that there is no principle on which you can move me now? I am beyond the reach of motive. You have it not in your power to give or to take away. You can neither shorten my life nor lengthen it. My terms have been rejected, and my secret dies with me."

"In ordinary cases," replied the doctor, "men wish to part in peace with all mankind; and as the living make conscience to speak no ill of the dead, so the dying generally seek to cancel all resentments against the living.—Sir Edward Vernon has never injured you."

"Dr. Johnson," replied Martin, "you weary me and yourself to. Enjoy, if you will, your dialectic triumphs among your literary friends, but you can have no triumph here. I have spoken my last."

The doctor attempted to expostulate, to reason,—but he had nothing to promise, nothing to threaten. His reasonings and expostulations were in vain, not one word more could he extort from this obstinate man; and back he went through the now deserted and almost solitary streets. And there came a gloom over his spirit, nor could he easily

dismiss from his mind the oppressive recollection that he had heard the last words of one doomed to death, and that those last words were not words of penitence.

With a heavy heart Sir Edward Vernon listened that evening to the report which Dr. Johnson brought from the castle of the obduracy of the prisoner.

"It is all over now," said the worthy baronet. "I must die in ignorance of my first born. Oh this is worse than childlessness!"

The party felt for the good man's affliction, but knew not how to console him. They trembled for his health, and they even feared for his mind. After a long pause, it being now evening, the doubtful and distressed man started up hastily and said, "I will see him myself."

His friends endeavoured to dissuade him,

he would not be dissuaded ; “ For,” said he, “ I can suffer no more than I do now ;—or if I should, it will end me.”

“ Let us go with you,” said the doctor and Mr. Wentworth.

“ Not into the cell ;” replied Sir Edward Vernon.

They accompanied him to the castle, and waited for him in the governor’s house; while he went alone to the murderer’s cell. They waited nearly an hour, and were impatient. At length he returned to them ; and if before he saw the prisoner, he had the look of sorrow, now he had the very aspect of despair. His countenance had been changed in an hour; and sorrow, when it does the work of time, does it dreadfully.

It was long before he could speak, and when he opened his lips, it was merely to say in a feeble voice, “ Let us return home.”—So they

returned with him to the lodgings, asking him no questions as they went along, for he walked feebly, and they feared to agitate him.

When they had been some time seated, and in silence, the worthy baronet, deeply sighing, looked at Dr. Johnson, and said, in a tone indicative of great mental suffering, "Speak—speak."

The doctor immediately replied, "I would fain speak words of comfort if I could; and I should be happy, could I hear from you that your visit has been successful—"

Sir Edward Vernon interrupted the doctor, and drawing his chair closer to that of his friend, he said, "I wish I had taken your advice—"

"You have seen the man?" asked Dr. Johnson.

"Only seen him," said the baronet slowly and solemnly, "I could not extort from him a

word—not a word—I besought him even for a sign of recognition—but his features were stone—I grasped his hands, they were the warm hands of a living man but they were passive in my grasp—the pulse was beating regularly.—Oh sir, men may say what they will of the awful silence of a great solitude, but the wilful silence of that gloomy cell exceeded in horror anything that I have ever heard or thought of. I wept—I adjured him by all recollections of my past kindness to him—I knelt down and prayed audibly—I entreated him only to let me hear his voice—that would have been a relief—but no—not a word—I feared that my reason would be unseated—perhaps it will—”

The party, according to their several ability, endeavoured to console their good friend, but the suffering had stricken deep into his spirit. They sat with him till past midnight;—and

even Mr. Plush, who had at one time so dreaded the probability of being compelled to attend at the execution, now volunteered his services, if perchance any prospect might be thereby had of hope to his afflicted companion.

“There is that hope yet;” said Sir Edward Vernon; and with that hope the party separated for the night, all save Sir Edward Vernon and Atherton; for the young man would not leave his benefactor, but insisted on watching him through the night.

The morning came; and with it came a new and multitudinous influx of spectators from the country, so that the city was crowded almost beyond precedent. There was scarcely any room in any house, especially in the more frequented parts of the city, from whence the sound of the stirring multitude could be excluded. The house in which the Vernon party lodged was in the way to the castle, and

the multitude passed it abundantly. While his friend was sleeping, Atherton, who thought that he heard an unusual, and strange tumult in the street, stole gently from Sir Edward's apartment and went to the front of the house, and there his curiosity was still more strongly excited, for he saw little groups of people just met and eagerly talking, some earnest in speaking, and others as ravenously listening, but interrupting their listenings with exclamations of surprise. The exclamations which reached Atherton's ear were too numerous to be intelligible ; but it was clear that there was interesting intelligence circulating. He rushed into the street, and was presently informed that the prisoner was dead.

“ Dead !” exclaimed Atherton.

“ Dead,”—replied his informant.

“ Impossible !” said Atherton ; and he ran

immediately to the castle ; where he met Mr. Wentworth just coming out.

“ How is Sir Edward this morning ? ” asked the magistrate.

“ I left him sleeping,” replied Atherton ;
“ but what is this report that is flying about the city ? ”

“ It is true,” replied Mr. Wentworth, “ the prisoner was found dead in his cell this morning.”

“ How ? ” exclaimed Atherton.

“ By poison I suppose,” answered Mr. Wentworth, “ the surgeons are now about to examine the body, and a coroner’s inquest will presently be held. In the mean time it will be desirable to get Sir Edward back to Vernon Park as soon as possible.”

“ Atherton returned to the lodgings where he found Mr. Plush and Dr. Johnson waiting

breakfast for Mr. Wentworth, who was gone out, and for Sir Edward Vernon, who had not yet risen. They of course had heard the story as had every living being in the city ;—and while they were consulting about the best method of letting Sir Edward know the truth, the worthy baronet made his appearance among them, having been intercepted in his way from his bed-room to the breakfast-room, and informed of the death of the convict.

With more placidity than his friends expected. Sir Edward Vernon joined the party, saying, not without a sigh, “So that unhappy man has perished by his own hand at last.” Then addressing himself to Atherton he said, “You once asked my blessing. Now it is my turn to ask yours : and it will be a blessing to me if you will take the shelter of my roof, and remain with me while I live ; and let me imagine that you are my son.”

Atherton took the hand of Sir Edward Vernon and kissed it, saying "I know no stronger or more pleasing claim to my gratitude and allegiance."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN a few days after the events recorded in the preceding chapter had taken place, the parties therein mentioned were thus disposed of.—Dr. Johnson and Mr. Plush returned to London. Sir Edward Vernon and Atherton were at Vernon Park, and Mr. Wentworth was at his residence near Halifax. Mr. Vernon and his daughter remained at Vernon Park.

The party, as may be supposed were not in high spirits. The melancholy impression of recent events could not suddenly or quickly wear off. There were many prohibited topics

and therefore much constrained silence. But had there been no other cause of gloom, there would have been enough to weigh heavily on their spirits in the appearance of Sir Edward Vernon. He was manifestly shaken even to the breaking up of his constitution, and to all but himself appeared destined to an early grave. He talked of making provision by will for his adopted son; but the arrangement was delayed from day to day.

Atherton and Sir Edward Vernon were always together, and the worthy baronet seemed only happy when in conversation with his young friend. But no one was jealous of the partiality: for Atherton was a general favorite: and there seemed to be no doubt on the mind of any, save the baronet himself, that to Atherton belonged, of right, the name of Verno.

Amidst the agitations and troubles recorded

above, though the minds of all were directed to the event of the trial of Martin, and more especially his expected confession, yet the attachment which subsisted between Atherton and Miss Vernon, had not on either side been forgotten. It was still cherished, though doubtfully. And now when the tumult was over, and the minds of all were in a state of comparative calm, the affection revived in its manifestations, if not in its strength, and though seen by all, it was reproved by none.

Sir Edward Vernon, who seemed to make it his whole concern and happiness to shew his affection for Atherton, was ever pleased to see them together, and he sometimes would talk to them of their probable union after the manner of one in his dotage, even till the tears came into his eyes. They were not sorry to have the approbation of Sir Edward Vernon to their union, but they grieved to observe that

this approbation was manifested in such a manner as betrayed a weakened mind. Moreover as there subsisted between them no recognized engagement, as the approbation of the lady's father had neither been sought, nor given, and as Atherton had nothing to offer but himself, nameless, doubtful, and portionless, there was not in the mind of either, the composed feeling of an accepted or accepting lover.

Now Sir Edward Vernon was precisely in that state in which it is exceedingly desirable that a will should be made, but in which friends generally think it not kind to suggest such a proposal. So days passed over, and the worthy baronet grew no better, but rather worse. He had been walking late one evening in the park accompanied by Charlotte and Atherton;—on his return to the house he was taken with a shivering fit, and, with an ob-

stinacy not unusual in amiable men weakened by sickness or sorrow, he resolutely refused to see any medical man, or to suffer one to be sent for. "I shall be better in the morning," said he. But when the morning came, he was senseless though breathing, and then the attendance of medical skill was rather a matter of form than of effect. Consciousness returned, but much weakened. He desired to see Atherton.

"Where is my young friend," said the baronet. He laid a peculiar emphasis on the word friend. It was an emphasis which seemed to intimate that he would fain use another term.

"I am here, Sir," said Atherton, "it is my hand that you are grasping now."

Then the fingers of the dying man moved rapidly, but their pressure grew fainter. He attempted to raise himself in the bed. Atherton

assisted him. "I will call you son—before I die." And Atherton, choked with grief, could just articulate the word, "Father!" and through his tears, he had the satisfaction to see that the good man heard him, and was pleased. It was the last word that Sir Edward Vernon heard;—he heard it with a smile, and with that smile he died:

As Sir Edward Vernon had died intestate; and as there existed no proof whatever that could establish any claim on the part of Atherton, the young man seemed now to be destitute or dependent on the charity of Sir Edward's surviving brother. Atherton indeed was by no means aware how high a place he held in the estimation of the merchant; for that gentleman, though not deficient in feeling and in sentiment, did not exhibit his partialities or display his feelings so strongly as his brother had been accustomed to do. Therefore the

situation of Atherton was one of exceeding difficulty. He could claim everything, or nothing ; but as he knew of nothing that could establish his claim, he hesitated to make it ; and feeling that he could no longer consider Vernon Park his home, unless he could claim it as his own, he resolved, in the pride of his independence, to quit it—and once more attempt a return to Madras. As soon therefore as the funeral of Sir Edward Vernon was over, he departed, leaving letters for Miss Vernon and her father, whom the domestics had already begun to address as Sir Henry Vernon. To Miss Vernon he wrote,

“ I am placed, my dearest friend, in a situation of such difficulty, that I know not how to act ;—I have thought till thought is almost madness. I dare not be ungrateful to my friends, nor will my self-regard permit me to be a dependent. I must leave you without

explanation or verbal apology, for an attempt to explain, or a mere offer to depart, would be absolutely begging for a home. We have loved—we must part—we may meet again—but if we do not, we must live on the memory of the past.—I will not say forget me.—I should be sorry to think that you ever would : —I will rather say—remember me—remember me with the kindness of esteem, and think of me with wishes and hopes that we may meet again under better auspices. If time and absence,—for what will they not do,—should wear away the recollection of our attachment,—and you should give your hand to another—for now you must expect many suitors will surround you—you may be happy, and by me you shall not be reproached—but if, with the prospect that now presents itself to me, I should be able to accomplish anything of an independence, small as that independence may

be, I will not hesitate to lay it at your feet, and claim your promised hand. I now exonerate you from that promise: for to claim it under present circumstances would savour of mere selfishness. Farewell—Farewell—I part with you with less emotion, because I do hope, even yet, we may meet again; but I cannot bear to submit myself to the shadow of reproach for selfish motives.—F. Atherton.”

To Charlotte’s father he wrote thus.

“It would better comport, my dear Sir Henry, with the feelings of my mind to take a personal leave of you before quitting Vernon Park. But your own judgment will tell you how much such a step as that might be misinterpreted. I have no claim upon you. I affect not to regard myself as the son of the late Sir Edward Vernon, it will be much that I may recollect him as one who honoured me with his friendship. The world is now before me—

nor are my prospects hopeless. I have even yet power and ability to labour, and yet a prospect that my labour may be repaid. I feel it a duty I owe to myself to take myself away from a temptation to the degrading indolence of dependence; and that you may be assured that I am not ungrateful for your kindness, or suspicious of its abatement, I will not hesitate to say, that should untoward circumstances or unforeseen accidents reduce me to need the assistance of a friend—you are the first friend to whom I shall apply, and I am sure that I shall not apply in vain.

“Accept the gratitude and preserve the memory of your obliged,

“F. ATHERTON.”

Father and daughter met, when Atherton had departed, and exchanged letters.—“I cannot blame him,” said the father, “but he labours under a delusion. I should be wretched

if I did not recollect that I used all my endeavours to prevail upon your uncle to acknowledge him. I have no more doubt that he was my brother's child than I have that you are mine. My poor brother was shattered in spirit. It was a weakness and waywardness that prevented him from avowing the conviction. And if I do not contest his claim, who will?—Will you?"

"No, my dear father!" And then she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him and wept abundantly.

Atherton in the mean time hastened to London, and sought again to take his passage to Madras, in the young and confident hope that he should, under the patronage of his foster father, be able to forward himself in the world, that he might return, and claim his affianced bride—provided that, in the interval, no more successful suitor had obliterated his first love.

It was a wild hope, and so are most of the hopes of youth.—Oh how he did start with a strange astonishment when, descending again from that very office where he had several months ago taken his passage for Madras, he met once more, at the very same point, that gentleman whom he had once trembled to meet! —“Sir Henry Vernon!” exclaimed Atherton —“Sir Francis Vernon!” replied the worthy merchant.—“My brother was blessed in his dying moments with acknowledging you as his son.—It is my living satisfaction to acknowledge you as my nephew and son-in-law.”

THE END.

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